

Chapter 1

"Magic does have its perks" Sirius said as he cast a small enlarging charm on the back seat of the Granger's car. "You don't mind, do you?" Claire shook her head, still somewhat surprised that magic was real. Then he cast one on the boot to ensure the kid's trunks and other stuff would fit. Then he turned back to the waiting group "Shall we go?"

An hour and a half later they arrived at King's Cross Station, and, after Arnold had parked the car, the five of them walked to platform nine, pushing two trolleys and carrying their assorted pets and bags.

When they arrived at platform nine, four of them looked around, then - as one - turned and looked at Sirius.

"Uncle Michael"

"Yes Harry"

"Is there something you want to tell us"

"About what"

"Platform 9 3/4"

"Oh - that" Sirius strode forward and walked towards a pillar, then stopped "Maybe we should take your trolleys" and before Harry or Hermione could say anything, he and Arnold took their trolleys and pet carriers, then Hermione and Harry watched as the three adults walked towards the pillar and vanished.

Harry glanced at Hermione, and could not help chuckle at the look on her face - it was a mixture of delight and fear. She turned, and saw him smiling, then smiled back.

They both jumped as Sirius' head stuck out of the wall.

"You two coming?" He asked.

"Ready?" Harry asked his friend.

"Ready" She said, and taking his hand in hers, they walked through the barrier together.

Chapter 2

Harry and Hermione emerged from the dark, on to Platform 9 3/4, and both of them stopped. Even Harry - who had been told a lot about this by Sirius - was overwhelmed by the sites and sounds surrounding them.

They both blushed when they heard Sirius chuckling, and realised they were standing open mouthed, staring at the rest of the platform.

"Sorry - it's just..." Hermione said "It's amazing"

"Well - come on. You have half an hour until the Express leaves, and as much fun as standing and staring is, you should see how fun walking and meeting people can be" Sirius turned and wandered off with the Grangers. Harry felt a tug on his hand, then walked with Hermione as she pulled him further in to the station.

Five minutes later they were walking down the platform when Hermione noticed that Harry was frowning. She looked around, and then started frowning too. Everyone - students, parents, everyone - was staring at them. No - they were staring at Harry.

"You noticed too"

"It's pretty hard to miss"

"Do you think I should say something"

"Do you want to"

"I really don't"

"Then lets go and find Michael and my parents and then get on the train" She pulled him back up the platform towards the three adults. When they reached them, she leaned over to her mother and whispered in her ear. She glanced down the platform, frowned, then turned to her husband and Sirius.

"We should get them on board - seems Harry is attracting attention" She said in a low voice, staring down the platform. Arnold and Sirius

both looked where Claire was looking, and saw a lot of people staring back.

"Okay" Sirius said, then glanced at Harry "Sorry"

"I'll get used to it" He said, keeping his head down "Maybe they will get used to it too"

The five of them walked towards the Express, four of them surrounding Harry in a square, and then boarded the train.

A silver haired boy turned back to his friends, and smiled in a predatory fashion.

"So - Harry Potter has come to Hogwarts at last" Draco murmured "This should be a lot of fun"

Ron Weasley watched as Harry Potter, and escorts, boarded the train. He had seen "The Boy Who Vanished" walking up the platform earlier, holding hands with a girl he could charitably describe as "plain". He wondered if they were dating, or if they were just friends.

"How do I get past his guards"

"The adults probably won't be going with him, and I am sure his friend won't mind sharing him"

"Okay. Do you want me to board now, or wait a while?"

Ginny Weasley had watched from behind a pillar as Harry Potter walked past, holding hands with another girl Ginny was not the prettiest girl - she had no illusions about that, but even she could see she was a lot more attractive than the girl who was grasping her prince's hand as if it were pure gold.

But this plain girl - Ginny could not bring herself to use the word "girlfriend" - would have a year with Harry before Ginny could meet him. And however plain a girl might be, a year was a long time - this girl could do anything.

Once again Ginny cursed her mother for not letting her go to Hogwarts with Ron. And speaking of Ron, maybe he could be the key...

At the very end of the platform stood a young girl with blue eyes and curly blonde hair. She wore round glasses, and has what her mother called a shy smile, even though her mother was well aware that her daughter was anything but. Her name was Sally-Ann Perks - something she considered a curse, but her mother wouldn't let her change it until she was married, so she had decided to make the best of it.

When she had heard the name "Harry Potter" being floated around the station, she had been only mildly interested. Her parents had known Harry's parents, and had told her stories about the Potters for most of her life. So she had found it hard to get excited about someone she felt she had known all her life.

But when she saw him boarding the train she smiled - the frown on his face made him look kind of cute, and also made her relax a little. After hearing about James Potter's exploits at school, she had feared his son might be of the same temperament, but if the look on his face was anything to go by he was hating every minute of this.

She looked up at the clock - it was time to board. Maybe she should talk to him - he looked like he could do with someone to talk to who wasn't going to worship him.

"I don't supposed you learned any locking charms from those books of yours?" Harry asked, gazing mournfully at the carriage door. The train ride was only half an hour old, and already he was sick of everything. Scores of students had walked past the carriage, all staring in at him. He had tried pulling the blinds, but for some reason they kept snapping up.

"I do know one, but there is the a chance I might not be able to reverse it, and we will be stuck in here forever" Hermione said with a smile. She saw him look up at the door as another student went past.

"I think I am willing to chance it" He said with a wry smile, then he looked up as a boy with red hair opened the door.

"Hi. Do you mind if I sit here?" The boy asked, glancing between Harry and Hermione "Everywhere else is full"

"No" Harry said "We don't mind, do we Hermione?" Hermione shook her head, and the boy sat down opposite them, noticing how close they were sitting.

"I'm Ron, Ronald Weasley" The boy said, smiling.

"Hermione Granger"

"Luke Skywalker" Harry said, causing Hermione to smirk and Ron to look at him in a puzzled fashion.

"So you're not Harry Potter?" Ron asked, glancing at Harry's fringe.

"Me? No" Harry smiled, then added "But my mother told me he was at the other end of the train - he has silver hair and the sort of sneer you would expect the arrogant hero type to have" He could feel Hermione shaking with laughter, but he didn't dare look at her - he was having enough trouble keeping his face straight as it was.

"Oh" Ron looked very put out, then stood up and left without saying a word. They both watched him go, then Hermione turned to Harry, still smiling.

"You know, he is not going to be happy when he finds out" She said.

"Well, what does he expect?" Harry replied, now smiling as much as his friend "I am not an animal in a zoo, and I am blown if I will let people stare at me for the rest of the trip" He looked over at Hermione "I don't suppose you know the boy I sent him to is, do you"

"No, but I am pretty sure his name isn't Harry Potter" She smirked.

"Draco Malfoy" A voice came from the door, and both Harry and Hermione looked up "The boy with silver hair and the sneer?" They

both nodded "His name is Draco Malfoy, and if the red-haired boy is a Weasley, then he probably already knows"

"Because..." Hermione asked.

"Lucius Malfoy and Arthur Weasley are not the best of friends, and while I wouldn't say they are blood enemies, it's not far off" She gave a little smile "I think Miss Granger is right, Master Potter - Ron Weasley will not be happy with you"

"Eh - what can you do" He said with a big smile, then looked back up at her "Who are you"

"My name is Sally-Ann Perks" She said, smiling slightly "But you can call me sweetie"

"Sweetie?" Harry and Hermione said together.

"Well - since we are betrothed, I think calling me Miss Perks might be a touch informal, don't you"

"Betrothed?" Harry repeated dumbly - he was sure he had misunderstood her.

"Didn't your guardian tell you?" She asked with a hurt, confused look.

"Tell him what?" Hermione asked.

"Well - my parents and your parents were good friends. And my birthday is July 29th, so I am only two days older than you" She paused, glancing at the two of them "A year later, we had a joint birthday party on July 30th, and Aunt Lily - your mother - and my mum - Susan - agreed that we should be betrothed, and that we would marry when we come of age" She watched their reactions, as she told her story, and couldn't help but smile at the look on her fiancé's face :- he was obviously trying to be polite as he could, but at the same time he was obviously shocked by this. She glanced at Hermione, only to find the girl staring at her with a massive smile on her face.

"So - Miss Perks - how much of that is actually true"

"Almost none" She sighed "You are good"

"Thank you" Hermione said, then looked at Harry, who was now looking at both of them in shock "I think you should tell him the truth"

"Okay. My parents were good friends of James and Lily. And when, six months after I was born, my father died, your parents took me in for a while so my mother could recover. But that is all - no betrothal, no wedding"

"So...why?" He asked.

"I saw the look on your face as you boarded the train, and as everyone had been walking past your carriage. You seemed a touch pissed off, and I thought you could use a distraction"

"So you decided to tell me we were engaged?" Harry said "Are you one of those crazy people"

"Stopped you thinking about the fame thing though, didn't it?" Hermione said with a smile. Harry stared at both of them, then burst out laughing - the first real laugh he had had since he boarded the train.

"So - Sally-Ann Perks, tell us about yourself" He said after he had calmed down.

"You don't mind?" She said, sitting down opposite them "I mean - the way you got rid of Ron"

"He was looking for The Boy Who... whatever" Harry interrupted her "You aren't like that, are you"

"I just thought Harry could use a friend" She said "And I am the friendly sort" She glanced at Hermione "Unless I am intruding?" She smiled as both of them blushed - she didn't think either of them knew how cute they were.

"We are just friends" Hermione said, still blushing "You are not intruding"

Two hours later they were still talking when the door to the carriage opened. The three of them looked up to see the boy Sally had identified as Draco Malfoy stood there, flanked by what appeared to be two very short mountain-trolls.

"So - is it true what they are saying?" Draco drawled "You are Harry Potter"

Harry glanced at Sally and Hermione, but the look on their faces suggested that "No, I'm Luke Skywalker" wasn't the right answer this time.

"Yes, Draco, I am Harry Potter" He smiled at the boy "And these are my friends, Sally-Ann Perks and Hermione Granger" Draco looked at the two girls with a sneer, his opinion of them obviously.

"You have been away from the wizarding world too long, Potter - there are classes of witches and wizards, and someone with your standing could do a lot better than..." He waved his hand to include the girls.

Harry looked at his friends, and both of them were waiting for his reaction.

"I think I can make up my own mind about who my friends are, Malfoy, and I think that my friends have more class in their little fingers, than you have..." He trailed off, as if looking for the right phrase "No - that's it"

"Careful Potter - you wouldn't want to end up like your parents, would you"

"Dying to save a loved one? And saving the magical world from an evil maniac in the process?" He couldn't help but smile "I can think of worse ways to go" He heard Hermione chuckle, and Sally laugh as Draco and his two sidekicks left without another word. As he watched them go, he turned back to his friends "Is it wrong that that was actually fun?"

Half an hour later, Ron Weasley opened the door to the carriage and marched in with a thunderous look on his face.

"You are Harry Potter" He said, glaring at Harry.

"Yes, I am" Harry replied with a smile "Why"

"You lied to me"

"Yes"

"Why?" Ron asked, still looking angry.

"Because I have only been back in the magical world for three hours, and already I am sick of being famous. My parents died - were murdered - and no one cares. All they care about is me and my ruddy scar. So - I lied. I want to make friends who want to be my friends, not who want to be friends with The Boy Who Lived" He glared at Ron
"So - I lied. Deal with it"

Ron looked at him, then the girls, then turned and left. Harry looked at the girls.

"Was I too harsh"

"Nope" Sally said "Either he will make friends with you or he won't. You shouldn't be forced to be friends with people just because you are famous" Hermione nodded in agreement, then added "You know that we are"

"I do" He said with a smile, then looked out of the window "Which houses do you think we will be in"

"I am hoping for Ravenclaw" Hermione said "From what the books say, it is"

"A house full of smart kids" Sally said with a smile, causing Hermione to swat her on the arm "I think you would fit right in" She added with a smirk.

"What about you?" Harry asked.

"Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw" Sally replied with a smile "My dad was a Claw, my mum a Puffer" She looked at Harry "James and Lily were in Gryffindor"

"Yeah, but so was Sirius Black" Harry said, mentally apologising to his godfather as he did. He then smiled "Well - we all appear to be agreed on one thing" He continued, then when they both look confused "None of us wants to be in Slytherin"

"Do you blame us?" Sally said "The house of dark wizards, evil witches and pure-blood supremacists?" They both stared at her "Okay - so my mother told me about the other houses, and she has some issue with the house of snakes"

"So - we are all agreed?" Hermione said "No Slytherins"

"And friends?" Harry said, looking hopeful.

"Friends" Sally and Hermione said together.

Chapter 3

Twenty minutes later, the Express pulled in to a station, and the three of them took their trunks and assorted things off the train and on to the platform. They were looking around, wondering what should happen next, and realising they were not the only ones - the entire first year class was staring around the platform, watching the students from the other years were walking towards the end of the platform. The three of them looked at each other, then trailed after them, and followed them to a group of carriages. Harry and Hermione stared at them, until Sally nudged them.

"What are you looking at?" She asked.

"The... horses" Hermione said softly "They look"

"Horses?" Sally asked. She had just assumed the carriages were pulled by magic.

"The black, winged horses that are pulling the carriages" Harry said, pointing at one of the creatures he was describing. Sally followed his finger, but could only see an empty space. She looked at Hermione, but her friend nodded in agreement with Harry.

"Okay - maybe it's a magic thing" Sally said, then added "The carriages are going, and we don't want to be stuck here. So maybe we should get on them, go to the castle and find out about the invisible horses later" She took their hands, and pulled them towards an empty carriage, then they got inside.

A moment later it pulled off, and they were moving. They watched out of the window as the countryside passed by, and then Sally sat bolt upright in her seat and pointed, hand shaking, to where they were going. The other two looked out and both gasped in amazement.

"Wow" Hermione said "I knew it was... but wow"

"It's amazing" Harry said "How does it stand?" Sally and Hermione looked at each other, then turned to him and said "Magic"

Suddenly they pulled to a halt, and they saw the other students clambering out of the carriages. The three of them looked at each other, then followed them out.

They got a few odd looks as they followed the rest of the students up to the castle, and in to a massive hall. As the students started to take their seats, the three of them wondered where they should go.

Eventually the three of them took seats at the end of one of the tables, and waited to see what would happen next.

"Where are they?" Professor McGonagall was pacing back and forth, occasionally glancing at the other teachers who were stood in front of her.

"Did they board the train?" Professor Snape asked.

"Yes - we had a full set of students when it left Platform 9 3/4, and it is not likely they left during the journey" Dumbledore said, looking over the group of students in front of him "Let's contact the Ministry, and have them conduct a search of both stations, and then see if we can find them. Meanwhile we have to conduct the sorting Minerva, so could you take the first years to the Great Hall"

"Of course, Albus" She replied, then turned to the students assembled in front of her "Follow me" She said, and led them in to the hall. Dumbledore turned to Snape.

"Severus - I know how much you enjoy the sorting, but could I prevail on you to go to The Ministry to find our wayward trio"

"Of course Albus" He replied, and walked out of the room. Dumbledore stood for a moment, then turned and followed McGonagall and the students.

"So - what's the delay?" George Weasley asked "We want to see if little Ronnikins is going to be a Lion or not"

"Maybe Percy knows" Fred replied, then yelled "Hey Perce"

"What?" Percy yelled back.

"What's the hold up"

"Something about missing students" came the reply, which caused Sally, Hermione and Harry to look round.

"You don't think..." Sally said, then she fell silent as a very short professor ("Flitwick" her mind supplied) walked to the front of the hall, an put down a small three legged stool, then put a hat down on top of it. Then he walked round the staff table and sat behind it.

"You think we have to get out our craft kits and make a nicer looking hat?" Harry asked under his breath, causing Sally and Hermione to giggle, but then he opened his mouth in surprise - he was sure the hat was frowning at him "Is the hat staring at me"

"Pardon?" Hermione said, looking at him as if he were crazy.

"Never mind" He waved them into silence, then all three of them looked on in shock as the hat started singing.

The Voice Of Hogwarts is how I'm known,
For a thousand years, it is I alone,
Who sort its students, decide their fate,
The meek, the bold, the small, the great.
The founder's houses - your family,
Which is for you? It's up to me.
The bravest go to Godric's house,
In Ravenclaw they use their nouse,
Hufflepuff kids are loyal and true,
While Slytherins take the opposite view.

Now times grow black, the skies go dark,
The coming storm will leave its mark.
The world will tremble when it breaks,
As from its slumber evil wakes.
But Lions Three stand true and tall,
To fight the dark, to stop night's fall,
With dark betrayal from within,
And so now the Three Lions must begin

To learn, to grow, to stand forth and fight
Or doom will befall the Heroes Of Light.

The three of them looked at each other, surprised by the singing, then fell silent as Professor McGonagall moved to the front of the hall.

"When I call your name, come forward, and the hat will sort you in to your house. Your house will be like your family - you will sleep in the same dorms, have classes together and eat together. So the sorting is not to be taken lightly - it will affect your whole future" She paused, glancing over the new students, then looked down at her list "Hannah Abbot"

A girl with blonde hair walked out of the group, and sat on the stool, putting the hat on as she did. There was a moment's silence, then the hat yelled "HUFFLEPUFF". She took the hat off and ran over to one of the tables, which was clapping as she sat down.

"Susan Bones"

"HUFFLEPUFF"

"Terry Boot"

"RAVENCLAW"

The sorting continued, then McGonagall called out "Hermione Granger"

For a moment there was silence, then she called out the name again. There was another moment of silence, then there was a stir at the end of the hall. McGonagall, and the rest of the staff and most of students, turned and saw three kids standing up.

"Can I help you?" McGonagall asked.

"I'm Hermione Granger" One of the girls said in a quiet voice.

"And may I assume your friends are Miss Perks and Mister Potter"

"Yes professor" She replied, noticing the stir Harry's name caused.

"Would you care to explain why you are sat at the Gryffindor table before you have been sorted"

"We came up with the other students from the station, and no one told us what to do, so we sat here" Sally replied, then added "Professor"

"Perhaps" Dumbledore said from his seat behind the staff table "We can proceed with the sorting, and deal with their method of arrival later"

"Very well, Headmaster" McGonagall turned back to the hall "Miss Perks, Mister Potter - if you would like to join the rest of your classmates, and Miss Granger" She gestured to the stool "If you wouldn't mind"

The three of them stood up and walked to the front of the hall. As they reached it, Harry gave Hermione's hand a quick squeeze, then he and Sally walked to the group of first years, while Hermione walked over to the stool and, trembling slightly, put the hat on her head.

"Miss Granger. I sense great power in you, and great potential" The hat said in her mind.

"Thank you" She thought.

"But a muggleborn witch in this world will have her own problems, yet despite this you are ready to make your way, regardless of the problems"

"Harry told me that a life lived in fear is no life at all"

"Mister Potter is right. So with that in mind, I think you should be in GRYFFINDOR" The last word was yelled throughout the hall, and Hermione took off the hat and walked over to the seat she had occupied five minutes before, and sat down again.

The sorting continued, then Draco Malfoy sauntered to the front of the hall, and picked up the hat. But even as he started to lower it, the hat opened its mouth, and the moment it touched the top of Draco's head,

the hat yelled "SLYTHERIN", and Draco grinned, then walked over to the Slytherin table, joining his two troll-like friends from the train. Sally glanced across at Harry and mouthed "There's a surprise". He smirked back, then looked up as Professor McGonagall called out "Sally-Ann Perks" He smiled at her as she walked to the stool and put the hat on.

"Miss Perks - nice to make your acquaintance. I remember your parents of course, and condolences on the loss of your father - he was truly a great man"

"Thank you"

"But to the business at hand - and already I sense a huge amount of loyalty in your heart. Standing up for Mister Potter was not insignificant, and you still want to be his friend"

"I think he will need that - you saw the reactions to his name" She paused "May I ask a question"

"A question? That is not unusual, but go ahead"

"Where are you going to put Harry? Because he will need a friend"

"An admirable question from a friend, Miss Perks, but I don't know. But in memory of your father, I will promise you that I will not put him in a house where he will be friendless, if at all possible"

"Thank you"

"And now we have arranged Mister Potter's future, we really should sort out yours"

"Oh yeah. I kind of forgot"

"That's why I am in charge of the process" The hat said, and she could have sworn the voice was smirking "But luckily it was not a hard choice to begin with. You belong no where but HUFFLEPUFF"

She smiled, lifted the hat off and walked over to the Hufflepuff table. As she sat down, she heard Professor McGonagall call out "Harry

Potter", and she was pretty sure that she and Hermione were the only people not muttering about the boy now walking down to the stool. Even the headmaster was leaning forward to see what happened. She turned to Hermione, who was smiling supportively at her, then they both looked at the front and watched Harry lower the hat to his head.

"Mister Potter. I was under the impression that you were dead"

"Like that was my fault" He snorted in amusement.

"And now we have your future to attend to - and a boy with a history like your's is sure to have an outstanding future"

"Another fan?" Harry gave another snort, but this one was far less amused.

"Face it, young Harry - you are destined for greatness, and no amount of protesting will change that, so you should get used to it"

"I guess. So where am I going"

"You would do well in any of the houses, but I think you would do very well in Slytherin - a place to hone your skills for the coming storm"

"Don't put me in Slytherin"

"It might do you well to consider it"

"But how much good can I do if I get expelled for punching Malfoy every day?" He could feel the hat laughing inside.

"Then, Mister Potter, I was asked to place you with one of your friends - Miss Perks or Miss Granger"

"Then Miss Granger"

"Why"

"Sally can take care of herself, but Hermione... I think she will have problems, and will need a friend in her own house" He pictured

Hermione's early days at St Juliet's, and was going to do anything he could to make sure it didn't happen again.

"Loyalty and courage in the same package - you don't make things easy, but since your mind is made up, then I am going to follow your wishes and place you in GRYFFINDOR"

He took the hat off, and started to walk over to the Gryffindor table, but stopped on the way and leaned over to Sally and whispered in her ear.

"You don't hate me"

"Did you pick"

"She needs a friend more than you do right now"

"True"

"Talk to you later"

"Of course"

"Mister Potter?" They both turned to see Professor McGonagall staring at them "If you could wait until later to conduct your affairs, the rest of your classmates would like to be sorted"

"Sorry Professor" On impulse he leaned over and kissed Sally on the cheek, then walked over and sat down next to Hermione.

As the sorting continued, she leaned over and asked "What was that about"

"I'll tell you later" They both looked up as Professor McGonagall called out "Ronald Weasley", and then both groaned as he was sorted in to Gryffindor even faster than Draco had been sorted in to Slytherin.

Then, after Blaise Zabini had been sorted in to Slytherin, the Headmaster stood up.

"I have a few announcements. First years should note that the Forbidden Forest is off limits to everyone, and some of the older students would do well to remember that too. Mister Filch, our caretaker, has added to the list of banned objects - a full list will be posted in each common room. Hogsmeade trips will begin in October, for students in the third year and above, and for all years the third floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to anyone who doesn't want to die a horrible bloody death"

Harry and Hermione glanced at each other, wondering what could be up there that was so dangerous, and why it would be in a school full of kids.

"But now - let's eat"

After the feast Harry and Hermione followed Percy up to the Gryffindor common room, after stopping to talk with Sally. Then they went their separate ways to their dorms.

Harry found his bed, and as he got changed he heard Ron come up behind him.

"So - sorry we got off on the wrong foot" Ron said "But... can we be friends?" Harry closed his eyes, and thought about what everyone had told him about being famous.

"We'll see" He replied, then he climbed in to bed, and pulled the drapes around him, leaving Ron stood alone outside, wondering what his mother was going to say.

Chapter 4

The next morning Harry and Hermione realised they had no idea where the Hufflepuff common room was, so they went down to breakfast together and sat down to wait for Sally to come in.

While they were waiting they looked around, and noticed it seemed very quiet. The feast the night before had been pretty rowdy, but almost everyone at breakfast seemed subdued. Harry turned to the kid sat next to him - a girl with long blonde hair.

"Is breakfast usually this quiet?" He asked.

"It's the song from last night" She replied, then glanced at his fringe and her eyes widened. Then she continued "The hat normally talks about the houses and their traits. The song hasn't been that dark since... since forever" She looked across at Hermione "From what I know the only other times were when Grindewald was on the rise, and when Salazar Slytherin himself left the school"

"And last night?" Hermione asked.

"Coming storms? Waking evil?" The girl shuddered "If what the hat says is true, then I would be worried if I were you" She looked up as someone sat down, then she smiled at the two of them and turned away. Harry turned back to Hermione.

"So - what are the odds that the coming storm has something to do with me?" He asked, burying his head in his hands.

"With us" She smiled in return.

"What's going on with us?" Sally said, coming up behind them, then she looked down at Harry "Mister Potter"

"The sorting hat gave its most depressing song in fifty years the same year I start at Hogwarts, and we were wondering if the two things were connected or not"

"Scary song and The Boy Who Lived?" Sally said with a smirk "Well duh!" She looked around "I guess I should go sit down" She started to

walk away when Harry reached out and grabbed her hand, and pulled her back.

"Have a seat" He said.

"I can't sit here - I thought we were supposed to sit with our houses?" She looked over at the Hufflepuff table, then back at Harry.

"It's one day, your first day - they can live without you for that long" Hermione said with a smile. Sally returned the smile, then picked up some bacon and put it on her plate.

Quarter of an hour later they looked up as Professor McGonagall came round with their timetables. She handed them to Harry and Hermione, then looked at Sally in surprise.

"Miss Perks? Surely the hat sorted you in to Hufflepuff"

"Yes Professor"

"So"

"We thought she should spend her first morning with friends" Harry said "There is no rule against it, is there"

"I guess not, but you will need to go Professor Sprout for your timetable dear"

"Of course Professor" She smiled, then gave Harry a hug and Hermione a smile before she went off to her own table.

They watched her go, then looked at their own timetables.

"Transfiguration and charms" Harry said "At least there is no potions until Friday"

"Why"

"From what my Uncle has told me, the potions master is..." Harry paused, trying to remember how Sirius had described Snape "A bully with an over-inflated sense of his own importance" He saw Hermione staring at him "His words, obviously"

"No classes with Sally until tomorrow" Hermione said "Do you think she will be okay"

"I think she will be fine" Harry said with a smile "Shall we go?"

Ron Weasley was not having a good day. He had woken up late to find Potter already gone, and when he arrived at breakfast he found his target sat with the muggle-born witch - something Granger - and a Hufflepuff. It wasn't that he hated Hufflepuffs - they were okay - but he had been raised to believe that houses should stick to their own.

"Still, it could be worse" He thought "She could be a Slytherin" He had sat down as close as he could to them, but the three of them were already as thick as thieves, and paid no attention to him.

Things didn't get any better in their first lesson - transfiguration. McGonagall gave them each a matchstick, and showed them how to turn it in to a needle.

He had watched in surprise as both Harry and Hermione (he had listened to the class list at the start of the lesson) managed the spell first time - the Granger girl even managed to get a sharp point on hers.

Meanwhile he accidentally ignited the end of his match, and nearly set fire to the desk.

He hadn't been able to find them at lunch, and Charms had proceeded in much the same way as Transfiguration - Potter and Granger doing very well, and himself less so.

He decided to try to use it to make friends with them - ask them for help with the homework they were set. The pair of them seemed friendly enough, and they should be willing to help him. And then he could finally write to his mother to tell her about his progress.

"Mister Potter - the Headmaster would like to see you before dinner this evening"

"Yes Professor" Harry said, glancing at Hermione "May I ask what he wants to see me about"

"He didn't say" Professor Flitwick replied "Professor McGonagall will meet you in your common room at half past five and escort you there"

"Thank you sir" Harry turned and left the classroom with Hermione.

"Why would the Headmaster want to see you?" Hermione asked, as they walked back to Gryffindor Tower.

"Not a clue" He replied "I can't think of anything I've done wrong"

"You don't think it's about Sally this morning"

"Maybe" He sighed "I hope she isn't in trouble because of me"

They continued walking back to the Tower, but before they reached it, they heard a voice behind them. They turned to see Ron running up the corridor. They rolled their eyes at each other, then watched as he stopped in front of them.

"Mr Weasley" Harry said with a smile "How can we help you"

"I was wondering if you could give me a bit of help?" Ron asked, looking at Harry.

"I am afraid I can't right now..." Harry started, but Ron interrupted him.

"The famous Harry Potter is too busy to help me? Why am I NOT surprised" He glanced at Hermione "Not too busy to help the girls in the class, were you"

"Not that it is any of your business" Harry said, his voice turning cold "But Hermione did everything on her own, and even helped me along a few times" He smiled at her as she blushed "Perhaps she can help you with your homework, while I am in the Head's office"

"The Headmaster's office?" Ron asked, looking confused.

"I was told he wanted to see me - that's why I can't help you at the moment" Harry said, still sounding frosty. He saw Professor McGonagall coming towards them "Hermione - I will see you after tea"

"Of course - have fun" She smirked, and Harry turned, glared at Ron, and walked down the corridor to meet McGonagall.

"Ah, Harry - come in, sit down" Dumbledore said, then after Harry sat in front of his desk, he turned to McGonagall "Thank you Minerva" When she had left, he turned back to Harry "So - how are you"

"Fine, thank you sir"

"And your first day? How did it go"

"It was okay"

"Both Professors McGonagall and Flitwick told me you did very well"

"Did they"

"In fact they were surprised that someone who was virtually raised as a muggle could be so advanced. You are aware of the rules about underage magic, I take it"

"Yes sir" Harry replied, wondering where Dumbledore was going with this.

"And your guardian"

"He is aware too" Harry said, then mentally added "He just didn't care all that much"

"Because if it was found that he was letting you break the law, it would almost certainly be necessary to place you with a more suitable family" Dumbledore said, and Harry finally realised what he was driving at.

"Hermione - Miss Granger - did better than me, sir, and she didn't get to practice either" He smirked "Did Professors McGonagall and Flitwick mention that?" He looked at Dumbledore for a moment, then added "Will that be all sir"

"There are two more things Harry" Dumbledore said "Your professors said that you were using some type of muggle writing materials in class"

"A notepad and pen sir"

"May I ask why"

"Hermione says that I write like a two year old on a roller coaster, sir, and if I try to write with a quill then my notes would be unreadable"

"You are aware that homework has to be submitted on parchment"

"Yes sir, but there are no rules as to what the homework has to be written with, are there"

"No" Dumbledore admitted "But exams use special quills, so you will have to get used to writing with them"

"I will practice every day sir"

"Good. And now for the other thing"

"Sir"

"Miss Perks" Dumbledore looked across at him "I understand you two have become friends"

"Yes sir"

"And that she ate breakfast at the Gryffindor table this morning"

"Yes sir" Dumbledore stared at him for a moment, then smiled.

"Well - it is nice you are making friends from the other houses, but don't you think she should spend the time with her own house"

"We didn't hold a gun to her head, sir - and if she wants to spend time with her house then we won't try to stop her"

"Because - as The Sorting Hat said - your house is your family, and it is important that she integrates with her family, don't you agree"

"Yes sir"

"Good. I am glad we got that sorted out"

"May I go sir?" Harry asked, then something occurred to him "I said I would try to help Ron Weasley with his homework" His heart fell as he saw Dumbledore's eyes light up.

"By all means - please go"

Half an hour later he arrived back at the Tower and, after giving the password, he went inside to see Hermione and Ron working side by side. He was now more or less sure that Ron had been asked to make friends with him, even if he didn't know why that was the case.

He looked at the pair, then sighed, and walked over and sat down next to them, then pulled out his parchment and pen and started his homework.

"So - how was your first day?" They asked Sally after dinner. During the meal he had told Hermione about his suspicions about Ron, and what else the Headmaster had said during the meeting. So they had waited until after they had eaten, then moved across to sit with Sally so they could do their homework together.

"It was okay" She replied "But my father was right about Snape"

"Really?" Hermione asked, glancing at Harry.

"He seems to hate anyone who isn't a Slytherin, and really seems to think a lot of himself" She looked at Harry "And he also doesn't think

much of... how did he put it?" She paused "Oh yes - he doesn't think much of celebrity students with celebrity parents" Harry put his head in his hands and moaned, causing Hermione and Sally to giggle.

"It's about what my Uncle said - my parents went to school with him, and he wasn't well liked"

"Yeah - dad said the same thing"

"So - Friday is going to be a lot of fun" Harry said, causing the girls to giggle again.

The rest of the week went by in much the same fashion - they went to classes, and each evening they did their homework in the Great Hall with Sally. They had watched for reactions from the staff, but so far Dumbledore had apparently decided to let it go.

On Friday morning, Harry woke up, feeling a little nervous. He and Hermione went down to breakfast, then - after a pep talk from Sally - went off to potions.

They walked down to the potions classroom, then waited around outside for the rest of the class to arrive.

"My name is Professor Snape, and I am here to educate you as to the brewing and uses of potions. It is a delicate art, one that most people can not develop any skills in. But those of you who can - those select few - I can teach wonders beyond your imagination" He glanced around the room, then his eyes settled on Harry "And there are those of you who believe there are better ways than mine out there already. Mister Potter - you have been warned about using muggle implements in class"

"Headmaster Dumbledore said I should learn to use quills for exams, but that I am free to use what I want until then" Harry replied.

"He did, did he"

"Yes sir"

"Then perhaps, since you are already so much a part of the school, you would be able to tell your classmates what you get if you add powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood"

Harry's mind went blank for a moment - Sirius hadn't taught him much about potions. His godfather had never had much of a talent for it. And Sirius had also told him a lot about Severus Snape, and what annoyed him most. He glanced at Hermione, gave her a smile, then turned back.

"A cure for a hangover sir?" There were a few laughs from the other Gryffindors, but Snape and the Slytherins stared at him.

"No Potter. Where would you find a beazor"

"Beazors'R'Us sir"

"Are you this dense naturally, Potter, or have you been taking lessons from that American guardian of yours?" Snape shook his head "What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?" Harry's had shot up in surprise - Sirius might not have been a future potions master, but after ten year's worth of stories about the Marauders and looking after Remus Lupin, Harry was not going to get questions about Wolfsbane wrong.

"They are the same thing sir - a plant that also goes by the name of aconite. Would you like me to tell you what it is used for"

"Thank you Potter, that will not be necessary" Snape spun on his heel and walked to the front of the class "Follow the instructions"

The rest of the class didn't go well - Snape forced Harry to work with Ron, while Hermione worked with a girl named Lavender Brown. Neither of them did very well, and by the end of the lesson they had lost ten points between them for various real or imagined offenses.

They were both quite glad to escape the classroom at the end of the lesson, and they felt their spirits raise as they walked to the Great Hall for lunch.

They stopped at the Hufflepuff table to talk to Sally, but before they could exchange more than a few words, a prefect hustled them off to their own table. Harry resisted the urge to glance at the staff table, but he would have bet the contents of his family vault that Dumbledore was smiling.

Chapter 5

The next few weeks went by, and Harry and Hermione learned to loathe potions, and truly detest Snape. And this only intensified as they both realised that, not content with bullying them, he was also starting to treat Sally in the same manner.

A month after school had started, they were doing their homework after tea, when Sally told them some disturbing news.

"Some of my house mates are... unhappy with me" She said, glancing at her house table. Harry and Hermione looked over, and saw a few of the Hufflepuffs glaring back.

"Snape?" Hermione asked.

"Sort of" She glanced at Harry, then continued "I lost forty points in potions, because I got a few questions wrong and because my sticking solution was wrong" She shook her head "But the real reason I lost those points was because I am friends with you"

Harry and Hermione looked at each other.

"How do you know"

"Because after he deducted twenty points for a runny sticking solution, he announced to the class that 'being friends with celebrities is obviously not all it is cracked up to be'" She smiled "So now my house mates are unhappy with me. Not because I suck at potions, but because"

"You are friends with me" Harry said softly. He closed his eyes for a moment, then looked at Sally "If you want to"

"No" She interrupted.

"You don't even know what I was going to say!" Harry said in exasperation. Sally looked across at Hermione, who smiled, then turned to Harry.

"You were going to tell Sally that she didn't have to stay friends with you out of some misguided sense of loyalty, and that you would be willing to ignore her if it would make her life better" She smiled "Do you know how predictable you are"

"Okay" Harry said "So what are you going to do about your house"

"Nothing for now - what can I do?" Sally asked "If I complain to Professor Sprout it will only get worse" She smiled "But - as crazy as this sounds - having friends like you two makes it easier to have friends like you two" She glared at Harry "So no gallant or brave gestures, Mister Potter"

"I get it" He smiled back, then turned to Hermione "So - you ready to learn how to fly?"

Two hours later they were stood side by side, along with the rest of the Gryffindors and all of the Slytherins. Each of them had a broom next to them, and Madam Hooch was striding towards them. As she arrived, Harry leaned over and whispered in Hermione's ear. She looked at him, then smiled shyly.

"Good morning class"

"Good morning Madam Hooch"

"Put your hand out over your broom, and say 'up'"

Harry yelled "UP" and the broom jumped in to his hand. Next to him, Hermione's did the same. Neville's rolled over, and Ron's just lay there. Harry wasn't surprised to see Draco's jump up in to his hand as well. From what he had been told, and what Hermione had read, the main thing about controlling a broom was self-belief, and if anyone in the class had excessive amounts of self-belief, it was Draco Malfoy.

"Now - mount your brooms and kick off"

Harry pushed off, and realised he was floating. It was an odd sensation, and he couldn't decide if he liked it or not. He glanced

sideways to see Hermione floating, eyes clenched tight shut. He took his hand off his broom, wobbled slightly, and pulled his hand back and decided not to do it again.

"Mister Malfoy - you are sitting wrong" He looked over, and couldn't help smiling - watching Madam Hooch lecture Malfoy was fun. But then he got distracted as there was a scream from his right, and he turned to see Neville shooting of in to the sky. He lowered his broom to the ground, then he walked over and helped Hermione land as well. Then he turned, and saw Neville fall off his broom and CRUNCH!

"Oh my" Hermione said as Ron and Dean helped Madam Hooch take Neville to the hospital wing. Then she heard a disturbance behind her and saw Harry and Draco facing off. She wandered over to them, and saw Draco holding a shiny red ball - she recognised it as Neville's RememberAll, and Harry was trying to get it back.

"Maybe" Draco said "I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find" Then he leapt on to his broom, and took off.

Hermione watched in shock as Harry walked towards his broom.

"Harry! You can't be serious" She yelled at him. For a moment, all he could think of was the phrase "No - that would be my Uncle", but he simply smiled and pulled out his wand.

She watched for a moment, then her eyes widened in surprise as Harry pointed his wand and yelled "ACCIO REMEMBERALL" A moment later he was holding the glowing red ball and smiling at the bemused look on Draco's face that was, strangely, replicated on Hermione's face.

"You thought I was going to take off and get myself expelled?" He smiled at her. She smiled back, then looked over at Draco, who was coming in to land, glaring at the pair of them.

"I was just scared that you were going to summon his broom from under him"

"POTTER"

Sally looked up as Draco stormed towards the Gryffindor table. Hermione had just finished telling her about their first flying lesson, which had Sally in fits of giggles. Hermione had just got to the point where she was about to yell at Harry when Draco's voice cut across the hall.

"Yes Malfoy?" Harry said politely.

"Think you are clever do you?" Draco said, coming up behind him
"Making me look stupid"

"You didn't need my help with that, Draco"

"Tonight. Midnight. The Astronomy Tower"

"You want to take him stargazing?" Sally asked "That's so sweet"

"A duel" Draco said, trying to ignore the smiles on the faces in front of him "At midnight"

"Why would I want to do that?" Harry asked.

"Because people will think you are a coward if you don't, and a Gryffindor coward at that"

"Sally - do you think I am a coward?"

"No Harry"

"Hermione - do you think I am a coward"

"No Harry"

Harry smiled, then turned back to Draco.

"Sorry - I have something else to do then, but if you want to meet me in the Great Hall at lunch tomorrow, I am sure we can find a teacher to referee the match properly" He watched as Draco glared at the three of them for a moment, then turned and stomped away "So - where were we?"

"POTTER"

Harry and Hermione had just walked in to the common room when they heard Ron's voice bellowing from the other side of the room. Harry turned to Hermione.

"Why is everyone yelling my name today"

"Maybe they don't think you pay enough attention"

"That must be it" He watched as Ron, Fred and George Weasley came over to them.

"What's this we hear about you chickening out of a duel with Malfoy?" Ron asked.

"He challenged me to a duel at midnight, on the astronomy tower" Harry said.

"And you refused?" George asked.

"You can't refuse" Fred added.

"You're a Gryffindor" George continued.

"And you can't let a Slytherin get the better of you" Ron finished.

"Do you really think he is going to show up?" Hermione asked.

"What?" The three Weasleys asked.

"Harry made him look stupid in flying, and he wants to get him in trouble. If Harry goes up to the tower, Filch, or a teacher - probably Snape - will be waiting for him, while Draco lies in bed laughing at us - at the Gryffindors" She watched the three of them think this through, then she turned to Harry "You think he will be there"

"Not a chance" Harry said, then they both turned back to the brothers "Guys - I am not going. Discuss it all you want, but if I go then tomorrow your house will be fifty points down, and you will have me

to blame. So - pick. Either you have a cowardly Lion" He could have sworn he heard Hermione smirk "Or you lose fifty points" And with that, he turned and walked up the stairs to his dorm. When he reached the door, he spun round in surprise as he heard someone behind him.

"So" Hermione said "Want to talk?"

"You know what we need?" Hermione said the following morning. They were walking down to breakfast, and as they walked past the house counters, they noticed the Slytherin counter was a little lower than the night before. They glanced over at the Slytherin table, and saw Draco sat at the very end of the table, and that he was sat alone.

They walked over to the Hufflepuff table and sat down next to Sally.

"So - ten points"

"Fifteen" Sally said with a slight smirk.

"He was actually there?" Hermione exclaimed in surprise.

"Not exactly" Sally said "From what I heard, he woke up Snape at ten to midnight, and dragged him up to the tower, and when you weren't there, Snape got a bit annoyed and took the points from Malfoy"

"And that's why Malfoy is sat on his own"

"The rest of his house, including Snape, is very unhappy" Sally said, then looked up as two prefects came past. They stood over her, glaring at Harry and Hermione "And I never thought I could sympathise with Malfoy of all people" She turned and looked at the two prefects "Do you mind"

"Shouldn't your friends be at their own table now?" The taller of the two - Joy Clancy - said, glaring at the two Gryffindors. Sally looked back, then rolled her eyes.

"I will see you at lunch?" She asked.

"Count on it" Hermione and Harry walked over to their own table, then sat down and started eating breakfast.

A few moments later Ron came in and sat down next to them, smiling at the sight of Malfoy sitting on his own.

"So Malfoy lost fifteen points for being out late last night" He said.

Harry and Hermione stared at him.

"Because he dragged Snape up to the tower" He continued.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, then Hermione turned to Ron.

"Last night you wanted him to go up there and face Malfoy because 'he couldn't let a Slytherin get the better of him' and now you think it is the best thing since sliced bread"

"Sliced..." Ron looked confused.

"Harry tricked him, which is why he lost the points" She glanced at Harry, then grinned and turned back to Ron "In fact - Malfoy lost the points because Harry behaved a lot like a Slytherin himself" She heard Harry choke on his pumpkin juice as Ron's eyes went wide in surprise. She gathered her books, and she and Harry walked out of the hall before they burst in to laughter.

"So - there is something I have been wondering about" Sally said. They were sat in the Great Hall, around four hours after tea. They had been doing homework and catching up - since Sally couldn't come to their common room, and they couldn't go to hers, they spent a lot of time in "neutral places" - the hall, classrooms, down by the lake - not a favourite location in October). So far, none of the teachers had commented, but Sally's fellow Hufflepuffs were still not happy with her choice of friends - another reason they tended to meet elsewhere.

"What?" Hermione asked, looking up from her book.

"The third floor corridor on the right hand side" They both looked at her in surprise.

"The bloody, horrible death corridor"

"I get that the squid is dangerous, and the Forest - for whatever reason - is dangerous, but a corridor?" Sally looked at them, excitement on her face.

"And you aren't concerned about the bloody, horrible death part"

"Well - a little. But don't you want to know what will cause the death?" Harry looked at Hermione, then turned back to the Hufflepuff.

"Okay - but if either of us die a bloody, horrible death, we are going to come back and haunt you"

"Fair enough"

Five minutes later they were walking up the stairs towards their destination - occasionally ducking in to the shadows when a teacher walked by - then they arrived at the door.

"It's locked" Sally said.

"So we go back to bed?" Harry asked hopefully.

"And you call yourself a wizard?" Hermione said. She pulled out her wand and whispered "Alohomora". A moment later there was a click, and the door swung open.

The three of them looked at each other, then Sally pushed the door open and the three of them snuck inside. Harry turned to close the door, then turned and looked at the two girls.

They were both looking up. he followed their gaze, then stopped.

"That's a big dog" Hermione said.

"That's the first thing you notice?" Sally asked in surprise.

"It is a very big dog" Harry said "Don't you think it is a big dog"

"Yes" Sally replied "It is a big dog" She paused, then added "But honestly - the three heads thing seems more unusual"

"Yeah - now that you come to mention it" Hermione said, but then trailed off as the dog turned its heads and looked at them. For a moment the three heads stared at the three students, then Harry, Sally and Hermione ran out the door. Sally cast a locking charm as they ran down the corridor, then they ducked in to a classroom.

"What was that?" Harry asked.

"A Cerberus" Hermione and Sally said together, then Hermione continued "They are said to guard the gateway to hell"

"You think there is a gateway to hell in the castle?" Harry asked "Why would anyone build a school on a gateway to hell"

"I don't know" Sally replied "But he was guarding something"

"Sorry"

"There was a trapdoor in the floor - didn't you see it?" The other two shook their heads, so Sally continued "Whatever it is guarding must be important, because I can't think of any other reason they would have a giant, three-headed monster in the school"

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, then turned back to her.

"Okay" Hermione said "But we should be getting to bed - before someone finds us"

They crept out of the classroom, and walked back towards the grand staircase. Sally looked down, then muttered something.

"What?" Harry asked softly.

"Peaves" Sally pointed - the poltergeist was floating around the second floor, and there was no way past him.

"Come back with us" Hermione said "We can sneak you in, and you can go back to your common room first thing" She looked at Harry "If she is caught, you know it will end badly"

Harry nodded, and the three of them crept off upstairs.

Chapter 6

"Mister Potter"

"Yes Professor"

"The Headmaster would like to see you before your first class" Harry looked at Professor McGonagall curiously.

"Why"

"The Headmaster did not see fit to share his reasons with me, but I would imagine that it has something to do with the visitor you had last night" She glared at him for a moment, then turned and walked out. Harry looked across at Sally, who was - as was becoming the norm - sitting by herself at the end of the table. He had thought that they had managed to get Sally in and out of the common room without her being noticed, but obviously someone had seen her. And that someone had decided to tell the Headmaster.

He saw Ron walk in to the hall, and then Hermione walked in behind him, glaring at the back of the boy's head. She saw Harry, and walked over to him, then flumped down on the bench next to him.

"He was talking about getting points for the house, by telling McGonagall about something that happened last night" She glared up the table at Ron.

"That would be why Dumbledore wants to see me" Harry said, sighing "You know - for someone who wants to be friends, he is not doing all that well at it"

"So - Harry. I thought I had made the rules about houses clear" Dumbledore said.

"You have sir"

"So why did Miss Perks spend the night in Gryffindor Tower last night"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time"

"Why"

"Because if she had been caught going back to her own common room, then the rest of her house mates would hate her even more than they do" He saw a flicker of something in the Headmaster's eyes, but he couldn't identify it, so he continued "I do have question, sir"

"Yes"

"Why is there a giant, three-headed dog inside the school?" Harry asked. To his credit, the Headmaster showed no trace of surprise.

"That is none of your business Harry" He said firmly "Now - are you going to explain why Miss Perks was sleeping in Gryffindor Tower last night"

"How did you know"

"Pardon me"

"If I am going to sneak anyone in to the common room again, it would be helpful to know what to avoid next time" Harry smiled at the look on Dumbeldore's face "Sir - if I might suggest something"

"Yes Harry"

"If you don't punish Sally for spending the night with us, then I won't tell anyone about the giant and dangerous dog you are keeping on the third floor"

"What about punishments for you and Miss Granger"

"It was my idea, sir" Harry said "Hermione had nothing to do with it"

"Very well. Thirty points from Gryffindor for persistently breaking school rules" He paused "You could do to make friends in your own house, Harry - you will be spending a lot of time with them over the next seven years"

"Miss Perks will be here for the same length of time, sir" Harry replied
"Or do you disagree with inter-house friendships"

"Harry - are you trying to annoy me"

"No sir. If I was trying I would be much better at it. I was just wondering why I am here if Sally broke the rules, and why when everyone in Hufflepuff actively dislikes Sally it is I that am getting a lecture on house unity"

"Wow" Sally and Hermione stared at him in surprise.

"I know" Harry said, shrugging "But he just annoyed me. And he didn't say anything about Sally and The Hufflepuffs"

"Don't worry about it" Sally said, then her eyes widened "It's Halloween"

"Well - yes" Hermione said, looking at Sally as if the girl were nuts for only just realising it.

"What she means is the reason I was annoyed with our Headmaster is that tonight is the"

"Tenth anniversary of your parent's death" Hermione said softly "I'm so sorry"

"Don't worry about it" Harry said "I am pretty sure that you two, and Uncle Michael, are the only people who remembered"

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sally asked.

"Talk about what?" He smiled "I don't remember anything about my parents, or that night" He saw the looks on their faces "Seriously - don't worry about it" He looked down the table and saw Ron, Dean and Seamus and a few students from the older years glaring at them
"It's time for Charms"

"Mister Thomas, swap places with Miss Granger. You will be working with Mister Potter today"

Hermione grimaced as she realised what this meant - she was to be partnered with Ron Weasley. Harry gave her a sympathetic smile as she moved her books next to the red-headed boy.

"Now class - today we are going to start levitation charms"

Harry smiled to himself. After all the practice Sirius had given him, this should be easy. Normally he would have helped Hermione, but that obviously wasn't going to happen. But he could help Dean, if the boy needed it.

Halfway through the lesson he heard Hermione's voice.

"No Ron - it's 'wingardium leviooosa' - a long vowel sound" He looked over and saw Ron glaring at her. But just as Ron was about to reply, there was an explosion on the other side of the class. Everyone turned to see Seamus staring at the now smoking remains of his feather.

"So - you had a fun lesson then?" Harry said with a smile. The two of them were walking back to the Tower, discussing the charms class.

Before Hermione could respond, they heard voices in front of them.

"She's a total nightmare - a bossy know-it-all nightmare. No wonder she doesn't have any real friends"

Harry reached out to take Hermione's hand, but she was walking away, and Harry could see her wiping her eyes. She pushed past Ron and his friends, then ran off down the corridor. Harry frowned when he heard Ron laughing and then strode forward.

He pushed past the group, then set off down the corridor after Hermione.

He found her ten minutes later - she was crying in an empty classroom. He slipped inside and sat down next to her. For a moment he sat in silence and let her compose herself. Then he reached over and took her hand.

"Some Lion I am" She said in a halting voice "Letting Ron get to me"

"My uncle told me that being brave isn't the same as being fearless" He replied, pulling her into a hug "It's being able to deal with things, even when they scare you"

"I am NOT scared of Ronald Weasley" She said in a high voice, then smiled sheepishly "I just don't like being teased - I never have"

"I remember" Harry thought, but then he said softly "No one likes being teased. But are you really going to let Dumbledore's puppet get to you"

"Dumbledore's puppet?" Hermione asked, wiping her eyes.

"I will explain it all later" He said "But it's nearly time for the feast, and you don't want to miss that, do you"

"I suppose not"

He reached up and wiped her eyes, then leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"You have me and Sally" He said as they left the classroom and walked towards the Tower.

"I know" She sighed "It's just"

"Just?" He watched her, but she simply shrugged.

"It's nothing"

"You sure"

"Let's go get ready"

The feast had been going on for a while, and Harry and Hermione were actually enjoying themselves. They mostly kept to themselves, but they engaged in conversation when people spoke to them, but that wasn't very often. They had both noticed that Sally was not at the Hufflepuff table, but when they had come in to the hall before the feast they had noticed the Hufflepuff house counter was a few points down from earlier in the week, and it wasn't hard to make the connection between the two events.

They were just about to start their second helping when the doors to the Great Hall were flung open, and Professor Quirrell ran up the center aisle to the staff table.

"There's a troll. In the dungeons" He said, in a surprisingly calm voice "I just thought you ought to know"

Then he collapsed on the ground in a dead faint.

Dumbledore watched the reaction of the students for a few moments, and wondered what Quirrell was teaching them in their DADA lessons. Even the seventh year students were running around like headless hippogriffs. He decided to have a serious talk with his Defence professor, after they had dealt with the troll.

"SILENCE" He yelled, rising to his feet. When everyone had settled down, he continued in a normal tone "Prefects - please escort your students back to your houses. The teachers and I will deal with the troll"

He watched as the students filed out of the hall, then he turned back to the Professors who were all on their feet "Shall we go?"

Harry and Hermione followed the rest of the Gryffindors along the passage to the main stairs. Both of them would have been amused if they knew they were thinking exactly what the Headmaster was thinking - that if there was a troll in the school then the best place to be was in the Great Hall with the staff, not running around on their own.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, they saw the Hufflepuffs streaming off to the right.

"Harry"

"Yes"

"Where's Sally?" She watched as the Hufflepuffs went past, then turned back to him "Where is she"

"Maybe back in her common room?" Harry asked, not really believing it.

"What if she isn't?" Hermione replied urgently "She won't know about the troll, and"

"Okay" Harry said "Do you want to go and look for her"

"Yes!" Hermione replied, surprising him with her conviction. He glanced down the corridor - the Gryffindors had vanished, as had the Hufflepuffs.

"Then let's go" They ran down the passage towards the dungeons, but skidded to a halt about halfway along. There were the sounds of a fight coming from one of the classrooms they had run by. Harry crept over to the door and, very slowly, pushed it open. Hermione leaned over him, and they both peered inside, then their mouths dropped open in shock.

Sally had not been having a good Halloween. She had left Harry and Hermione after lunch, and almost at once a prefect had taken her aside, and lectured her on the appropriate place to sit during lunch, and a reminder of where she should be sitting that evening.

She stood and listened, then - because of the lecture - arrived late to her class, which cost her ten more points and a lot of glares from her house mates. And by the end of the lesson another ten points had gone the same way.

Over the next few hours, she thought about the day, and what had happened in the two months since school had started. And it was not altogether good.

Her mother had told her stories when she was little. Stories about Hogwarts, about the houses, about her father. And about the great Albus Dumbledore - the wizard who had killed the Dark Lord Grindelwald and brought a new age of peace and enlightenment for the wizarding world.

But the Headmaster, the man of whom her mother had spoken with such respect, was apparently conducting a campaign to isolate Harry from all of his friends. Her isolation in her house was solely because of her friendship with Harry, but she had little doubt that the prefects and teachers would not be punishing her if the Head was not encouraging them. He wanted to break her and Harry up - for want of a better phrase - so Harry would have to turn to people in his own house. Students who, if Harry and Hermione were right, were also part of Dumbledore's plans.

She knew her life would be easier if she stopped being friends with Harry. She would stop losing points, her house mates would stop shunning her, and she could have the school year she wanted.

But The Sorting Hat hadn't put her in Hufflepuff for no reason. Harry was never going to have a normal life, and he had gone out of his way to be nice to her. She was going to stand by him, even if it cost her all the points in the world.

She heard her classmates come in to the dorm, then leave again, and she realised it was time for the feast. She pulled open the drapes around her bed, then climbed out of her bed. She changed, then headed out of the dorm to the Great Hall.

Five minutes later she arrived at the doors to the Great Hall, but - before she could go in - she saw the House Points counters. The only one with less points than Hufflepuff was Gryffindor, but it was a close contest. She thought about spending the whole evening surrounded by people who hated her, and then turned back and started to return to her common room.

She got about halfway down the corridor when she saw Professor Quirrell coming towards her. He seemed to be in a hurry, but it was the look on his face as he came towards her that scared her, rather than his pace, as she ducked out of his way.

When she talked to Harry and Hermione about it later, she would also say she was sure she heard a faint, mocking laugh as the defence teacher hurried by, but at the time wondered what was making him rush so fast.

A few moments later she found out, as she saw a huge shadow on the wall in front of her, and a moment after that she was confronted by the form of a giant troll.

For a moment she stood and stared at the creature in front of her. It was bad enough there was a giant, three-headed dog in a castle full of children, but now there was a troll as well?

But then a second later she realised that it was more likely that the troll wasn't meant to be there, and that was what Quirrell - the heroic and brave defence teacher - had been fleeing from.

Then it finally occurred to her she was standing right in front of a creature that could eat her in a single bite, and that... and that it was coming towards her.

She gave a slight yelp, then ducked in to the classroom next to her, hoping that the troll would lumber past the door and ignore her.

She waited, holding her breath, then she gave another yelp as the door burst inwards and covered the room in wood chips. The troll came into the classroom, swinging its club around, and homing in on her. She froze, hoping help would come, but then she decided that she was sick and tired of being the victim. Her house was picking on her, the prefects were picking on her, the teachers and headmaster were picking on her, and now it seemed like the universe itself had decided to pick on her.

It wasn't fair, and she had had enough. She thought back to her charms lesson, then stood up and, pulling out her wand, yelled "WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA"

She had to admit, the troll looked very surprised when the desk smashed into its head. She continued to fling desks at the troll's head, dodging repeated swings up the club.

She was starting to wonder if she was the only one in the school who knew there was a troll in the school, and if she would run out of desks before help came, when the door burst open and suddenly she felt herself flying across the room. She crashed in to Hermione and Harry, and the three of them tumbled to the floor.

"Thanks"

"No problem"

They got up, then scattered as the club came towards them. Sally flung another desk while Hermione tried to summon the club. Harry fired a stunning spell, but all it seemed to do was annoy the creature even more.

"This isn't working"

"No? Really"

"DO SOMETHING"

Harry responded to Hermione's yell by jumping on to one of the remaining desks and then leaping on to the troll's back.

"What are you doing"

"Something" Harry yelled, trying to hang on.

"Oh"

He saw Hermione raise his wand, and he took the time to stick his wand in the troll's ear and yelled "STUPEFY". The troll's head shot to the left, and a moment later the club sailed out of its hand towards Hermione. A moment later he heard Sally yell "LET GO!" and he dropped to the floor, then cheered as the club flew over his head, smacked into the troll and knocked it to the ground.

For a few moments there was complete silence in the room, then the teachers came rushing in from the corridor, then stopped in surprise.

"Oh good" Harry said, lifting his head up "The cavalry"

Chapter 7

Dumbledore looked at the room laid out in front of him, and sighed. It was two months in to the school term, and so far it wasn't going as he had hoped. Harry was proving to be remarkably independent, and appeared to have developed his father's limited respect for the school rules.

But his friendship with the Perks girl, while annoying, has been proving useful. The Hufflepuff house was putting pressure on young Sally, and up until the night before he had been pretty sure that the friendship would be coming to an end fairly soon. And then Harry had saved her life, and that pretty much put an end to any chance of the friendship ending.

And now - now he had to hold a hearing into how three students ended up fighting a troll while the teachers were nowhere to be found. It had started when he had received an owl from Sally's mother early that morning, and was followed almost at once by an owl from Harry's guardian. He was certain that the only reason he hadn't heard from Hermione's parents was that they didn't have a pet owl to deliver the message.

So he had hastily arranged a meeting with the parents (including the Grangers), the students and the Heads Of Houses. He was hoping to deal with the problem as quickly as he could, and get on with the business of running the school and molding young minds - and one young mind in particular.

There was a knock at the door, and he went over and opened the door.

"Professor Dumbledore" Sirius said "It's nice to see you again"

"Mr Whiteheart. Do come in" Dumbledore ushered him in, then watched as the others filed in to the room. When they had all settled down, he went to the front of the room "Good afternoon, and thank you for coming" He glanced around "We are here today to discuss the events of last night, and to sort out any problems arising from it" He turned to the students "Mister Potter, Miss Granger, Miss Perks. Perhaps you would like to tell us your version of events"

Harry stood up and explained everything that had happened after Quirrell had run into the Great Hall, up to the point where he had passed out in the classroom. Hermione told more or less the same story, then Sally explained how she had ended up in the classroom instead of the hall, and the fight that had ensued. She left out her suspicions about Quirrell, because she didn't think this was the time to start blaming teachers.

"If that is all?" Dumbledore asked.

"I have one question" Susan Perks, Sally's mother, said. Everyone turned to look at her.

"Yes, Mrs Perks?" Dumbledore indicated she should go on.

"Why is it that my daughter felt that spending the evening alone than with her house mates?" She was looking at Professor Sprout when she asked this "And why has my daughter lost more points in the first two months of school than most people lose in a year"

"Your daughter" Professor Sprout said in a firm voice "Has shown a persistant disregard for the rules, and has shown a truly stunning lack of loyalty to her housemates" Harry snorted in disgust at this, causing Sally's mother to turn to him.

"Mister Potter? Do you have something to say?" Harry looked up at Dumbledore, who was shaking his head, then at Sirius, who was nodding. He glanced at his friends, who were both nodding as well. So he turned back to Mrs Perks.

"I made friends with Sally on the Express - after she told me that you and my mother had betrothed us when we were kids" He heard Sally snicker and saw Susan smile fondly "And - for whatever reasons - the Headmaster and the other teachers decided they didn't like it" He turned to stare at Dumbledore, but carried on talking to Susan "You know who I am, and how I am known, but your daughter just wanted to be friends with me, and it has cost her all the points and the friendship of most of her house mates" He turned back to her "I told her to think of herself, but - unlike the rest of Hufflepuff House - she has a sense of loyalty and stayed my friend" He smiled at Sally, who

blushed and ducked her head. He sat back down with Mrs Perks smiling at him, and Dumbledore looking less than pleased.

"After reviewing the events of last night" Dumbledore said "The staff have decided not to take points from anyone, and to award ten points each to Miss Granger and Mister Potter for their actions in rescuing Miss Perks" He saw Harry lean over to Sally and whisper something in her head that caused her to laugh, then she leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"Headmaster?" Sally raised her hand to ask a question.

"Yes Miss Perks?" Dumbledore turned to her.

"May I be resorted?" This question was greeted in absolute silence. The three students looked around, as did the Grangers, wondering why all the other people in the room looked so shocked.

"Resorted?" McGonagall asked.

"Why would you want to be resorted?" Snape asked in a derisive tone.

"Are you kidding?" Arnold Granger asked. The teachers stared at him in surprise "Have you been in the same meeting as everyone else"

"Doctor Granger - you are new to this world, so"

"Professor Dumbledore - I might not be a wizard, but I have been to school" He smiled at Sally "Sorry to talk about you in the third person, Miss Perks, but" He turned back to the staff "Sally is in a house where she is loathed. Why would any of you think she would want to stay there if she had a choice"

"It's... it's not done" Dumbledore said "The Sorting Hat decides who goes where, and it has the final say"

"And is it ever wrong?" Sirius asked.

"Rarely, if ever" Was Snape's reply, which caused Sirius to lean over and whisper "Which is why it put Peter in Gryffindor" to Harry, which caused him to snigger. Snape glared at both of them, then Sirius

turned back to the teachers and said "Can't you ask The Hat again?"
Dumbledore opened his mouth to protest, then closed it again. He looked over at McGonagall, who simply shrugged.

"Very well. Professor McGonagall - could you fetch The Sorting Hat from my office?"

"Are you sure you wish to do this?" Dumbledore asked. Sally nodded, and with a sigh, Dumbledore lowered the hat on to her head.

"Miss Perks"

"Yes"

"Why am I talking to you again"

"Professor McGonagall didn't tell you"

"She did, but I wanted to hear it from you"

"Oh" Sally paused, then realised that the Hat could probably hear her pausing.

"Yes, I can"

"I have spent two months in this school, and ever since I arrived, my house - the house you told me stood for loyalty - has shunned and ignored me for staying loyal to Harry. I have lost a lot of points, and I have no friends in my own house"

"So what do you want from me"

"I want to be resorted. If I am supposed to be in Hufflepuff, I want you to tell me, but if I should be in another house, then I want to know as well"

"And what if you should stay where you are?" The Hat asked.

"Then I will deal with it. Or leave the school. I am just done being picked on"

"Well - it doesn't matter anyway"

"Why"

"Because you are going in to Gryffindor"

"Really"

"Really"

"Why"

"Because for two months you have put up with behavior that Helga finds appalling, and you are not backing down. And you are the first student in nearly 400 years to ask for my judgment a second time. Your loyalty to your friends is impressive, and does you credit, but your bravery and courage outstrips it. So - my dear - you may stand true and tall as a Lion, because you are a GRYFFINDOR.

The last word was yelled to the room, and as she took the hat off, she saw Harry and Hermione bouncing up and down in their seats, her mother smiling but the teachers seemed to be more shocked than anything else. She stood, put the hat on her back on the chair, then walked over to her... house mates and sat between them. For a moment there was silence, then Dumbledore stood up.

"We will announce it after dinner, but we will, of course, let the prefects and Head students know at once" He turned to Professors Sprout and McGonagall "You will sort out her belongings"

"Yes Albus"

"Then I believe we are finished here" He turned to the students "Miss Perks - congratulations on your new house"

As the students, parents and teachers left the room, Dumbledore walked over and sat down next to the Sorting Hat.

"Was that really necessary?" He asked.

"Destiny can not be denied, Headmaster"

"I suppose not" He sighed "Were you wrong? At the feast"

"No"

"Are you wrong now"

"No"

"Then"

"I never liked defining a child at the age of eleven. Rowena and Godric agreed, but Helga and Slytherin were adamant" The Hat paused "Most children change in the seven years they are here, and generally if they are retested before they leave, they would go to Hufflepuff or Slytherin. But we set the course of their life the first day they arrive. But Miss Perks... the last two months have changed her a lot - the first two months are usually spent getting used to the place and making friends, not being bullied and forced to pick your friends at virtual wand point"

"I did what was necessary" Albus said "Harry must be protected if he is to fulfill his destiny"

"You did what you thought was necessary, Headmaster" The Hat said "But destiny is rarely wrong, and my duty - as always - is to the students and to the school, not to the staff or to the Headmaster"

"No" Dumbledore thought "The year is not going as I had hoped"

Chapter 8

Harry, Hermione and Sally walked down to breakfast the next day, and entered the Great Hall to complete silence.

The night before the three of them had returned to the Tower together, and had been greeted in silence then as well. Then, when Hermione had taken Sally upstairs to the first year dorm, the rest of the first years, and quite a few of the older students, burst in to noise.

"What is she doing here?"

"Why is she going upstairs?"

"Did you three really fight a troll?"

"Why is a Hufflepuff..."

"She is a Gryffindor" Harry said, in a quiet voice that somehow silenced the entire room. For a moment Harry wondered if he had accidentally cast a silencing spell, but then Ron had spoken up.

"That Hufflepuff is a Gryffindor?" He shouted "How the hell did that happen?"

"Her house turned against her, she got stuck in a room with a troll that may or may not have been let in to the school on purpose, and the three of us fought it to unconsciousness, then she asked The Sorting Hat to resort her because, for some reason she didn't feel welcome in a House where she wasn't welcome" Harry paused and looked around, and saw everyone staring at him "She is my friend, and she is Hermione's friend, and The Hat put her in this house" He turned to see Hermione and Sally coming back down the stairs "Welcome to Gryffindor - do you know everyone here?"

After a few minutes, things calmed down, and most of the Gryffindors had warmed up to their newest house mate, but Harry and Hermione were not entirely surprised that the Weasleys were not amongst them.

The hall fell into silence as the three Gryffindors walked in.

The Slytherins glared at them because they had hoped that if Harry wasn't killed, he would at least be expelled. And since neither had happened, they had resorted to glaring.

The Hufflepuffs glared at them because, for a house that prized loyalty above all, having a first year leave them after only two months was a huge embarrassment - one for which they blamed the trio now walking in to the hall.

The Ravenclaws were silent because their table was between the Slytherins and the Hufflepuffs.

The Gryffindors were silent because they didn't want to be the only ones making any noise.

The three of them looked around, then Sally waved at the Hufflepuffs, then took Harry's hand and Hermione's hand, and the three of them walked, hand in hand, to the end of the Gryffindor table.

"So - did you get your new timetable from Professor McGonagall?"

"I did" Sally smiled at Hermione "But oddly enough my first lesson as a Gryffindor is Herbology, with... guess who?"

"Oh my"

"Welcome class" Professor Sprout walked in to the greenhouse "Today we are learning about Devil's Snare. Who can tell me about the plant?" Harry looked around in surprise as Sally's hand went up at the same time as Hermione's "Miss Perks?"

"Devil's Snare is one of the more dangerous plants - if you struggle against it then it only holds you harder, and makes escaping even more difficult"

"Very good Miss Perks. Five points to Hufflepuff" There was a moment of silence, then she said "My apologies Miss Perks. Five points from Hufflepuff, five points to Gryffindor. So - who can tell me where it grows?"

"So - how did this happen again?"

"I am not entirely sure"

Sally and Hermione were helping a limping Harry back to the castle.

"Were you not listening to my explanation at the start of the class?" Sally asked "The whole struggling thing?"

"I was" He replied in a whiny voice "I guess I got distracted" He looked down, and tried to remember how he had got the huge gash in his leg. He knew it involved a Devil's Snare, and one of the tables collapsing, but that was about all he had. He had a sneaking suspicion that one the Hufflepuffs had been aiming for Sally and missed completely, but if Sally didn't know, he wasn't going to be the one to tell.

The three of them walked in to the hospital ward, and the two girls lead Harry to a bed.

"Do you want us to wait?"

"No - you should go back to class - if you aren't there to take notes, how am I going to pass?"

"Okay. See you at lunch?"

"If Madam Pomfrey lets me go by then, yes"

"Okay" He watched the girls leave, then laid back on the bed.

A few minutes later he saw Madam Pomfrey come out of her office. He was about to attract her attention when he saw Snape following her. Harry shrank back, trying to be as invisible as he could make himself. He watched as the two teachers walked past him, then he noticed that Snape was limping, and there appeared to be a little blood around the bottom of his left leg - the trousers appeared to be slightly shredded.

He kept quiet as Snape swept out of the hospital wing, then - as Madam Pomfrey went back to her office - he called out her name.

"Mister Potter? How long have you been here?"

"Only a few minutes Madam Pomfrey" He said "I got attacked by a Devil's Snare in Herbology"

"Oh" She walked over and looked at him "May I see?"

"Yes" He pulled up his trouser leg, and she sat down and looked over him.

"Well - that doesn't look too bad. I can fix it up with a little potion, but don't put much strain on it for the next few days"

"Strain?"

"Avoid running, dueling, or..."

"Getting bitten by three headed dogs?" Harry said, then smirked to himself as the Healer flinched.

"Good advice" She stood up and walked over to the cabinet, then came back with a green bottle "Drink this. It will make you a little sleepy, but you should be up in time for dinner tonight"

"Thank you"

"So you think Snape was trying to get past the dog?" Sally asked.

"I think so, yeah" Harry looked around "But why?"

"Maybe he needed the portal to get back home" Hermione said, causing the other two to choke on their pumpkin juice. She grinned when they glared at her "Sorry"

"Maybe he is after whatever the hellhound is guarding?" Sally suggested "Maybe he was trying to play fetch?"

"Do you think we should tell someone?" Hermione asked.

"Who?" Sally replied "Madam Pomfrey obviously knows, and my guess is that the Headmaster knows too. My mum says that when she was here, Dumbledore never missed anything"

"And maybe it was totally innocent" Hermione continued "If the troll was a diversion, someone else could have been trying to get to Snape's house"

"I suppose" Harry said. He looked up the table "So - are you looking forward to the match this weekend?"

"Not really a big fan of Quidditch" Sally said "It just strikes me as... too easy. I never saw the point in it"

"How about you Hermione?"

"I've read about it" She replied "But I've never seen a game. It doesn't sound that exciting - kind of like football in the air"

"Me neither" Harry said "But apparently my dad played seeker and chaser during this years here, and my Uncle tells me that games are fun to watch, and even better if you support a team"

They turned and looked at the Slytherin table, then back at the Gryffindor players further up their table.

"So - Go Lions?" Sally asked.

"Go Lions" The others replied.

"Welcome to the first match of the season" Lee Jordan announced "Gryffindor - with their new seeker Georgia Hagan - versus Slytherin" There were various cheers and hisses from the stands, but Harry and Hermione were simply staring at the fourteen players swooping and diving around the stadium. Sally - who had seen one or two games - was staring at her friends with an amused smile on her face. She had been telling the truth before - she really didn't enjoy Quidditch as a sport because - after all the stuff she had learned from her father - it really was too simple to be bothered with. But watching her friends - their looks, their reactions - it should be a fun day.

She continued to watch them through the game, and couldn't help smiling and sometimes laughing at their expressions and reactions. Both of them seemed so caught up in the action that she could have slapped them and neither would notice.

"And, despite Hagan's capture, Slytherin win by 180 points to 160" Lee sounded very depressed, and the three students who started walking back to the Tower knew they should have been depressed, but two of them were still hyper about the match, and the other was still watching the reactions of her friends.

"So - Hermione - you like Quidditch then?" Sally asked, trying to keep her voice free from mirth and smugness.

"If you want to do the 'I told you so dance', you should do it now" Hermione replied with a smile "Because once we get back to the Tower, I suspect the rest of the Gryffindors will take it badly"

"Don't worry sweetie" Sally smiled at the both of them "You ready to support Ravenclaw next week?"

"Ravenclaw?" Harry asked.

"You think I am going to support Hufflepuff?" She looked at him in surprise.

"I guess not" He looked around "So - do we put our sad faces on?"

A week later, Hufflepuff slaughtered Ravenclaw by 200 points, much to Sally's disappointment, and they took the lead in the Quidditch Cup. The only upside was that the majority of Hufflepuff students wanted nothing to do with her, and left her alone. Only a few of them took the time to mock her and tease her for picking the loser house.

The weeks before Christmas went by in surprisingly peaceful way. Snape persisted in deducting points from all three of them, and between them they came up with ever more outlandish theories as to what Snape had been doing with the hellhound on Halloween.

Then, two weeks before Christmas, a letter came for Hermione.

"Hermione? What's wrong?" Harry asked.

"My parents - they are going to France for Christmas" She said, still reading from the letter "There is a dental conference in Paris, and my father has been invited to speak"

"Wow" Sally said "So - Christmas in Paris. Sounds fun"

"They want me to stay here" Hermione continued "They say the conference will be dull, and will take up most of their time. And they don't want an eleven year old girl walking around Paris on her own, even if she is a witch" She sighed "So - I guess I am staying here for the holidays"

Harry and Sally turned and looked at each other, then turned back.

"We can come visit, if you want" Harry said softly, but Hermione shook her head.

"You have been waiting to see your Uncle since Halloween, and you" She turned to Sally "Want to see your mother just as badly. I don't want to interfere" She looked up the table "Maybe I can get to know some of our house mates better" She smiled, but both Harry and Sally could hear the hint of sadness in her voice.

"Time for transfiguration" Harry said, getting up.

"Dear mother. I know you were looking forward to having me home for Christmas, but something has come up. Hermione Granger, the girl you met when I was resorted, has to stay at Hogwarts over Christmas, and I don't want her to be alone. Harry is going home, and the only other Gryffindors are the Weasleys, who are not her favourite people. Please say yes. Sally"

"Dear Uncle. Hermione's parents are going to France, and she is spending Christmas at school. Sally - the girl who became a Gryffindor at Halloween - is going home, and I don't want Hermione to be alone with the Weasleys. So - can I stay? Your Nephew, Harry"

"Dear Sally. Of course you can stay, and I am so proud that even after your move to Gryffindor, your Hufflepuff traits still remain. I might ask Headmaster Dumbledore if I can visit on Christmas Day, if that is all right. See you soon. Mum"

"Dear Nephew. Yes - you can stay. Your father did the same thing for his friends in the first year, and his friends were grateful. If you like, and if Dumbledore agrees, I will come visit on Christmas, just to say hi. Take care, your Uncle"

Hermione looked up in surprise as Harry and Sally bounded up to her in the common room. Both of them were smiling like crazy and literally bouncing up and down on their feet.

"Yes?" She asked, looking at them carefully.

"We've got something to tell you" They said together.

Chapter 9

"So - looking forward to tomorrow?" Sally asked, walking in to the dorms. It was Christmas Eve, and the day after they had managed to arrange visits from not only Harry's uncle and Sally's mother, but also Hermione's parents. They were just coming for the afternoon, then going back to Paris.

"Would I sound like a two year old boy if I bounced up and down saying 'YESYESYESYESYESQUEEEEE'?"

"Yes" Sally smiled, then added "But you should do it anyway"

"So - what did you get Harry?"

"I asked my mother to buy some chocolate for him. You?"

"A book on recent magical history. He needs to learn less about the Goblin Rebellions, and more about the recent dark wars"

"And about himself?"

"Maybe a little" Hermione replied with a smile.

"What do you think he's got us?"

"I don't know" Hermione frowned "Maybe sweets?" She smiled then continued "Has he seemed a little quiet recently?"

"Quiet?"

"Not his normal noisy, bouncy self"

"Maybe a little" Sally nodded "But it's Christmas. Maybe he is missing his parents - if he never has a Christmas with his family..."

"Speaking from experience?"

"Maybe a little" Sally smiled softly, then sat down next to her and rested her head on Hermione's shoulder.

"So - do you want to talk about it?"

"Maybe later" She bounced to her feet "Wrapping present time!!"

"MUM!!DAD!!" Hermione bolted down the Grand Staircase, and flew across the entrance hall in to the arms of her parents. Harry and Sally followed her down at a more sedate pace, but Harry speeded up when he saw the figure coming through the doors.

"Uncle Mike!" He ran towards Sirius, then glanced back at Sally.

"She'll be here in around an hour" She replied, then added "If it makes you feel any better..." She looked up, then ran towards the door yelling "ENTRANCE DOORS!!!". Harry and Hermione turned and smiled at her, while Sirius, Claire and Arnold looked at her as if she was crazy "Sorry" She smirked.

"So - how was Paris?" Hermione asked.

"You sure you want to do this?"

"I can't keep lying to them"

"Okay. But this is only about Rupert, right?"

"Of course"

"I suppose you are wondering why I called you all here?" Harry said, then smiled "I ALWAYS wanted to say that!" He looked up at the assembled group, realised they weren't smiling, then continued "There is something I haven't told you" He looked at Hermione "While I was growing up, I attended a muggle school, but because of the number of people who were looking for me, Uncle Mike decided to put me under a glamour, and a new name" He saw Hermione sit up straight as she guessed what he was about to say "I went to St Juliet's, under the name Aaron Brown"

Claire and Arnold gasped in surprise, while Hermione's mouth fell open.

"So - if you want me to stop being friends with you, I will. And Mr and Mrs Granger - if you would prefer me to stay away, I will"

"Is this the Aaron you were telling me about?" Sally asked, and when Hermione nodded, she turned back to Harry "I'm impressed Mr Potter. But why..."

"Why didn't I tell her at once?" Harry asked "It's because..."

"I asked him not to" Sirius said "If people connected Harry to Aaron, and me to Rupert, then they could come after us" He smiled at the Grangers "Harry wanted to tell you as soon as he realised Hermione would be coming here, but I asked him to hold off"

"I understand" Hermione smiled "Harry - Aaron - why did you decide to tell us now?"

"It was Halloween" Harry walked over and knelt down in front of her "I couldn't stand lying to you after you saved my life, so I talked my Uncle in to telling you the truth" He looked over at Sirius "He agreed that anyone who would take on a full grown troll would keep our secrets"

"You know how patronizing that sounds?" She asked with a smile.

"Yes" He smiled back "But it was mostly my uncle, so blame him" He looked at her hopefully, and Hermione laughed. Harry turned to look at her parents "I know you two were not fond of Aaron"

"I think they described him as a 'child of Satan, raised by a demon, created solely to make their lives a living hell by corrupting their virtuous and angelic daughter by turning her in to as much of a hell-spawned monster as himself'" When Hermione realised everyone in the room was staring at her, she looked at her parents "Well - you did" Harry stared at her for a moment, then turned back to Claire and Arnold.

"Anyway - I know you two were not too fond of Aaron, and if you want me to stay away from your daughter, I will"

"Harry - that's sweet, but from what Hermione has said over the last four months, and your friendship with Sally, we both think that you are good for her. And that Aaron is long gone" They both stood up, and walked over to hug him "But remember..."

"If I get your daughter in to any sort of trouble, you will beat me to death with a shovel"

"Pretty much"

"I will keep that in mind" He looked around "So - any more questions?"

Later that evening the three of them walked back to the common room, then stopped just inside the portrait hole. The four Weasleys were sat by the fire.

"Want to go for a walk?"

"It's late"

"Wait here" Harry said, then ran up the stairs to his dorm room, grabbed one of the presents he had opened earlier, then ran back to rejoin the girls "Come with me" They left the common room, and walked down the corridor to the nearest classroom "I have something to show you" He unfolded the cloak "This was my father's, and someone gave it back to me"

"That's nice" Sally said "What is it?"

Harry flipped the cloak over his head, and smiled at the gasps of surprise.

"An invisibility cloak?" Hermione asked in surprise "They are really rare"

"It was your dad's?" Sally asked "Who gave it back to you?"

"I don't know - it was at the end of my bed, and the note was just signed 'a friend'"

"Wow" Hermione smiled "So - you want to go exploring the school?"

"Actually I hoped we could find somewhere to go talk. I thought that you might have things to say, or ask me, that you didn't want to in front of your parents"

"We could do that too" Hermione beamed.

Twenty minutes later, they crept into a deserted room on the seventh floor, and sat down.

"So - do you have any questions?" Harry asked, folding up the cloak beneath him.

"You two really went to school together?" Sally asked.

"Apparently so" Hermione replied.

"From the start of primary school" Harry added, then - at the lack of understanding on her face - added "When we were seven"

"Wow" Sally turned to Hermione "Any exciting Harry tales to tell?"

"Well" Hermione said with a sly smile "There was the time that Harry got in trouble for drawing a smiley face all over..."

"My parents?" Harry interrupted, causing the two girls to look at him strangely.

"Pardon?" Sally asked, but Harry was already on his feet, walking over to the other side of the room. They stood up and followed him, then caught sight of the mirror he was staring at.

"Can't you see them?" Harry asked "Can't you see my parents?" The girls looked over his shoulder, and then they both started talking at the same time.

"My father" Sally said "He is dancing at my wedding"

"I am Headmistress of Hogwarts" Hermione said "And... dancing at your wedding??" She turned to Sally "So it doesn't show the future?"

"I don't think so" Harry continued to watch his parents. They were smiling at him, and at Sirius for taking care of him "Unless someone is going to bring my parents back to life"

"So... what?" Sally asked.

"I haven't a clue" Harry said, refusing to look away from the mirror.

"Harry - do you miss your parents?" Hermione asked.

"I told you" Harry replied, still not looking away from the mirror "I don't have anything to miss"

"But if you could have them back - as impossible as it is - would you want them?"

"Of course" He looked across at Hermione "Why?"

"Sally?"

"More than anything" Was the reply, then Sally added "And Headmistress?"

"You know how the muggle-born are viewed. I would like to do well"

"So - what do you think?" Sally asked "That it shows what we want?"

"Very good Miss Perks" They turned at the voice behind them, and saw Professor Dumbledore stood in the corner, smiling softly.

"Sir?"

"The Mirror Of Erised has captured more than one person in its gaze, and men and women have wasted away in front of it. As Miss Perks said, it shows nothing more or less than your heart's deepest desire" He looked at the three of them "It is going to be moved soon, so I suggest that you don't come back here again" He turned, and walked out of the classroom

"So - you think this is connected to the portal to Snape's place?" Sally asked.

"Probably" Harry smiled "So - do you have any more questions?"

"Did you two ever go out?" Sally asked suddenly, causing the other two to turn and stare at her "You DID?"

"We did" Harry said simply.

"Just once" Hermione added.

"And it didn't end well" Harry continued.

"To say the least" Hermione finished. Sally stared at them, then shrugged.

"Okay. We should go"

The rest of the holidays went by, and the three of them decided that Harry's revelation about his past was not going to change their lives all that much.

On the last day of the holidays, they decided to visit Hagrid, partly because they felt guilty about not doing it earlier, but mostly because the Weasley family - mostly Ron - were trying to make friends with them. Or at least were trying to make friends with Harry, and trying to ignore Sally and Hermione as much as they could.

They walked down the path to the groundskeeper's hut, then knocked on the door. A moment later it opened, and Harry looked out.

"Ah. You three" He looked back in to the hut "I s'pose you'll be wantin' to come in?"

"It's cold out here" Harry said.

"All right" He pushed the door open, and let the three of them in "So - what brings ya down 'ere on a day like this?" Hermione looked across at Harry.

"You know the Weasley's?" Harry asked.

"A nicer family you won't meet"

"Ron is trying to make friends with me" Harry said "And he is doing it because the Headmaster told him to"

"Ah - well. Dumbledore's a great man" Hagrid said forcefully "'E knows what's best" The three of them looked at each other, and decided to change the subject.

"Hagrid..." Sally asked "What. Is. That?" The other two looked over at where she was pointing. A large egg was sat in a pan above the first, but it didn't look like he was trying to cook it.

"Ah - that" He looked around, as if checking if anyone was listening "I won it from a man down The 'Ogs 'Ead" He looked over at the egg and smiled "'Sa dragon egg" He said proudly. The three students stared at him for a moment, then Hermione started speaking in a careful tone.

"Hagrid - it's illegal to keep dragons as pets" She paused, then added "And you live in a small house made of wood"

"It'll be fine" Hagrid said, smiling "I can move 'im into the Forest when 'e grows up" The three children looked at each other, still concerned.

"Hagrid - you can't keep a dragon in the Forbidden Forest. Someone will find out" Sally said quietly, then, as an afterthought, added "And it might eat someone"

"E won't do that" Hagrid argued, gesturing at the egg "E'll be a good boy"

"Maybe we should be going" Harry said "It's getting dark, and the rest of the students will be returning" He stood up "Can we come back and see it hatch?"

"Course ya can" Hagrid replied "I'll let ya know when"

"Come on guys" Sally stood up "Thanks for the tea, Hagrid"

The three of them set off back up to the castle.

"So - what do you think?" Harry asked.

"I think he's mental" Sally said "My mum told me he was mad about dangerous monsters, but raising a dragon?"

"He just has problems seeing them as dangerous" Harry smirked "And given his size, can you blame him?"

"Maybe we could talk to someone... the Headmaster?" Hermione asked, but Harry shook his head "But Dumbledore and Hagrid seem to be friends - Hagrid obviously respects him a lot"

"But it would put us in his debt" Sally said "It would give him more power over Harry" Harry nodded, then smiled "What?"

"The day you met me - on Diagon Alley - my Uncle and I had been to see Minister Fudge. He seemed to be more happy about the idea of me staying with Uncle Mike than Dumbledore was. Maybe he could help?"

"But keeping dragons is illegal" Hermione said "He would have to do something"

"Maybe we make Hagrid out to be the hero" Sally said "Then we can move the dragon and Hagrid doesn't get sent to Azkaban"

"Azkaban?" Hermione asked.

"Wizard Prison" Harry replied "Horrible, horrible place" He looked up as they approached the main doors of the castle "We should talk about this later" They remained silent until they reached the common room, when Sally and Hermione went up to their room. They both sat on Hermione's bed, and Hermione cast a privacy charm.

"Why did you ask about us?" Hermione watched Sally's reaction, and - in her head - smiled a little.

"I just didn't want to be a third wheel" Sally replied "If you and he went out - you and Aaron I mean - I wouldn't want to get in the way"

"We went to one school disco, for Valentine's Day" Hermione smiled at the memory "We went, we danced. We even kissed"

"And?"

"We decided that we liked being friends" She smiled again. She was an only child, but from all the books she had read, the best description she could come up with was that kissing Harry was like kissing her brother "I just wanted to be his friend Sally, nothing more" She paused "Are you really worried about being a third wheel, or is there something else?" She smiled as Sally went a little red.

"Maybe" Sally went more red "He is cute, but he is also a little clueless. And with Dumbledore and Weasley and everything else - he needs more people on his side" She looked around "Friends on his side"

"But in the future?" Hermione asked, then she smiled as her friend went even more red.

"And you wouldn't be upset?"

"No" Hermione replied, then saw some of the other girls coming in "Not at all"

On the other side of the tower, Harry pretended to be asleep to avoid Ron making yet another attempt to be friends.

Chapter 10

The weeks went by, and Harry spent most of them thinking a huge dragon was going to sweep down and eat everyone in sight. He knew it was somewhat paranoid and unlikely - dragons didn't grow that fast - but every time he left the castle, Sally and Hermione noticed that he spent most of the time gazing at the sky.

"Harry?" Ron asked as they walked down for the Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match "What's wrong?"

"Sorry?" Harry looked round "What?"

"You seem to be staring at the sky a lot. You worried about something?"

"He's worried about the weather" Sally said, walking up beside them "Isn't that right, Harry?"

"Yes" He replied distractedly "Just worried about the weather"

"Who asked you anyway, Perks" Ron sneered at Sally "And what side will you be cheering for today?"

"The side my friends are on" She replied with a sweet smile. A moment later Harry leaned over and whispered "That doesn't really answer the question, does it?" She burst out laughing, causing everyone to turn and stare at her "Sorry" She glared at Harry, who simply smirked in return.

They continued walking down to the pitch, and took their seats. Hermione glanced at Harry, who was still staring upwards, then looked back at the pitch as the fourteen students shot out of the launch areas on brooms, and Lee Jordan started his commentary.

"Welcome to the third match of the year - Hufflepuff vs Gryffindor. The Lions are in third place after a narrow defeat by Slytherin, while Hufflepuff have a truly commanding lead after their virtuoso display against Ravenclaw. If Hufflepuff win today, they will almost certainly have claimed the House Cup, but if Gryffindor can reverse their fortunes, then they can move in to second place. They could move in

to first, but, given their last performance, a 220 point victory seems unlikely" This was greeted by a chorus of boos from the Gryffindor end, while the Slytherins burst in to laughter "And now - the teams"

Harry and Hermione watched, still entranced by the display of flying skills, as the teams lined up. A moment later the game started. The three of them started to cheer along with the rest of their house mates, cheering which doubled when Katie Bell scored, putting Gryffindor in the lead.

Sadly - for the red and gold end of the pitch - the ten points Katie scored made up half of the total points the Gryffindor team scored in the match. The Hufflepuffs ran riot over The Lions, scoring goal after goal in quick succession, and the students in stands that were draped in black and gold were going crazy, and even the Slytherins seemed to be siding with The 'Puffers as they utterly humiliated Gryffindor.

Ninety minutes after Katie had scored the opening goal, she scored her second, and final, goal, mere seconds before the Hufflepuff seeker grabbed the snitch.

"And the game comes to an end, thankfully, as Hufflepuff gets the snitch. The final score... oh who cares"

"400 to 20" McGonagall announced, sounding as depressed as Lee was. The Hufflepuffs were bouncing up and down in absolute glee, and even the Slytherins and Ravenclaws were cheering, while the Gryffindors simply filed out of the stands in absolute silence.

"We are pretty much out of the cup" Ron moaned as the first years walked back to the castle "Even if Slytherin slaughter Ravenclaw next week, we can't catch Hufflepuff without a miracle" He caught sight of Sally, trudging back to the castle with the rest of the first years "And it's all her fault" He said, pointing at Sally. Everyone stopped and stared at her, while she glared back at Ron.

"My fault?" She turned back to the first years "How is this my fault?"

"You switched sides - you pissed off the Puffers. If you hadn't done that, they wouldn't have wanted revenge so badly" He looked around at the other first years, trying to get them on his side.

"They just have a better team" Sally said "The Gryffs are lacking focus in the team - the seeker..."

"Hagan"

"Hagan isn't playing as she should" She turned to Ron "What's the job of a seeker?"

"To get the snitch" Ron replied with a sneer.

"Just that?" She sneered back "Cause my father taught me that the seeker should distract the other team's keeper, and try to get the focus of the beaters away from the chasers. A good seeker can get a team more points than the 150 for catching the snitch. And the truly great seekers are like an eighth member of the team" She looked around "The Hufflepuff seeker knows this, and the result was the display you saw today" She turned to Harry and Hermione "Shall we go?" She strode off towards the castle without waiting for a reply, and while Harry and Hermione followed her, the rest of the first years watching them.

"Sally?"

"Hermione?"

"Did your dad play seeker?"

"Yes"

"Was he good?"

"One of the best. Taught me everything he knew"

"Do you think anyone else knows?"

"Probably not. They wouldn't think he would have had time"

"You going to tell them?"

"Why should I?"

"You could try out next year. Or offer to coach them"

"They don't want me in their house, so why should I help them?"

"Fair enough" They both looked up as Harry ran towards them.

"Hagrid! Eggs! Now!" He panted, then collapsed into the seat next to them, trying to get his breath back. Sally and Hermione stared at him for a moment, then Sally asked him to repeat himself "Hagrid said it's time" He whispered "Do you want to come with me?"

Five minutes later they were bundled up and heading down to Hagrid's hut. They had left the Tower without being noticed, and it was a few hours before anyone would know they were missing.

They knocked on the door to the hut, and Hagrid let them in, then turned back to the table at the center of the room. The three kids gathered round and watched the egg rock. As they watched, in absolute silence, the egg began to split apart, and a tiny dragon began to emerge.

"In't he cute?" Hagrid asked as the head emerged. Sally and Harry looked at each other and rolled their eyes, while Hermione stared at the spectacle in front of them.

A few minutes later there was a tiny little dragon, scampering around the table top, and all four of them were staring at it. Hagrid looked happier than they had ever seen him, while the others all managed to smile supportively, even though each of them was more worried than ever.

"He's perfect!" Hagrid said "Little Norbert!"

"Norbert?" Sally asked, stifling a smirk. The dragon looked at her, then turned and padded over to Hagrid.

"See - he knows who his mummy is" Hagrid said, then yelped and patted his beard after Norbert belched flames.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, then Harry suddenly jumped to his feet and ran over to one of the windows and stared out of it.

"Harry?" Sally asked. She and Hermione had risen when he had jumped up "What's wrong?"

"Someone was watching, someone saw the dragon" He replied.

"Did you see who it was?"

"Yes" He replied. There were very few red-heads in the school, and even fewer that were as small as the figure he had seen "It was Ron"

When they got back to the common room, they found Ron sat by the fire, talking quietly, but intently, to his three brothers. He glanced over at them as they entered, gave them a brief smirk, then turned back to his conversation.

"So - what do we do?" Sally asked. They had sat down as far away from the group of siblings as possible.

"Run over there and obliviate the lot of them?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Do you even know how to do that?" Hermione looked at him. When he shook his head, she continued "Maybe we should just wait and see" The other two stared at her in surprise "Hagrid is a good friend of the Weasleys - so I can't imagine that his older brothers will let Ron get Hagrid in to too much trouble"

"So he will try to get us in to trouble instead?" Harry asked, looking over at the four red-heads.

"More likely they will try to get me and Hermione in trouble, so they can make friends with you when we are expelled" Sally said with a sigh "But they won't do anything for a while, and they will almost

certainly talk to Dumbledore first" She looked over at the Weasleys again "So - Minister Fudge?"

"Dear Uncle Mike, Hagrid has managed to end up raising a dragon in his hut. It's a long story, and I will tell you, but there is a problem. Well - a problem other than having a fire-breathing dragon in a small wooden hut. Ron and his brothers know about it, and Sally thinks they are going to blame it on her and get her expelled. So we were wondering if you could help us get the dragon out of Hogwarts without Hagrid, or Sally, ending up in Azkaban. Do you have any ideas?"

"Dear Harry, I do have an idea. Do you think you can get the dragon ready to travel on Saturday?"

"Sunday would be better - Saturday is the day of the Ravenclaw/Slytherin game, and most of the school is excited about it. If it was interrupted for anything, I think there might be a riot"

"Okay - Sunday then. Minister Fudge will arrive in school at around two in the afternoon. Make sure Hagrid understands the story"

"We will"

"But... what if the other dragons don't like him? What if 'e's lonely? What if they're mean to 'im?" Hagrid was pouring a huge jug of water over a chair that Norbert had set on fire.

"Hagrid - you can't keep him here" Hermione said firmly "Minister Fudge has arranged for... Norbert... to go to Romania to live with the other dragons there. Do you remember Charlie Weasley?"

"Yeah"

"He works out there, and can keep an eye on him" She reached out and touched his shoulder "Norbert will be okay, and he really can't stay here"

"I s'pose you're right" Hagrid looked over at the baby dragon, who was now the size of a Labrador puppy "Sunday?"

For the rest of the week, the three of them kept an eye on Ron and his brothers, but - aside from one or two knowing looks and quite a lot of sneers, they didn't appear to be doing anything overly sneaky or suspicious.

"So - what do you think they are up to?" Sally said, as the three of them walked down to the Quidditch pitch "Because this waiting is driving me insane"

"Tomorrow it will be over" Hermione said "So unless they do something tonight, we don't have to worry" She looked towards the pitch "Who should we root for today?"

"Well - short of a miracle, we aren't going to win - Hufflepuff are a thousand points ahead of us, and the only way to make that up is to beat the Claws by the maximum, and have Slytherin do the same to the Puffs" Sally said with a sigh.

"Maximum?" Hermione asked.

"If one team gets 40 goals, then the match is brought to an end. But if they get 39, then catch the snitch, then they get the full score - 540 points"

"Oh. Okay"

"But the best we can hope for is a Ravenclaw victory over Slytherin, then we could get second place if the points are right"

"So we cheer for Ravenclaw?" Harry asked.

"We do"

"And Higgs catches the snitch for Slytherin, giving them a win by 180 points to 30" Lee Jordan said in a resigned tone "This sets up a final match between Slytherin and Hufflepuff for the cup, although with Slytherin needing a 210 point win, I am confident in saying that Hufflepuff will take the Quidditch Cup for the first time in nearly twenty years" There were massive cheers from the Hufflepuff section of the stands "And the defeat for Ravenclaw puts them in to a third place play off with Gryffindor, which might actually be a contest in comparison to the final"

The crowd started to leave the stadium, but Harry, Hermione and Sally waited behind and watched them leave.

"Well - that went well" Harry sighed "Why can't the Slytherins ever get anything right? Beating Ravenclaw, supporting Voldemort - they are useless"

"They are a game away from winning eight cups in a row" Sally said.

"And you have to love the irony that the only team that can stop them is the one that beat us by nearly 400 points" Hermione couldn't help smiling "Do you think Ron is going to cheer for them?" The other two laughed at the image, then the three of them stood up and walked out of the stands towards Hagrid's hut.

When they arrived, they found Hagrid sat outside, nursing his hand.

"Hagrid? You okay?"

"Norbert just gave me a little nip - I don't think 'e's 'appy about goin' away"

"You know it's for the best" Hermione said "He can't stay here"

"I know, but I'm goin' to miss 'im" Hagrid sighed "The Minister's comin' tomorrow?"

"At two o'clock. You'll be ready?"

"Yeah"

"See you then" The three of them turned back up to the castle, chatting about the game, and what the next day would bring.

"Miss Granger, Miss Perks, Mr Potter - the Headmaster would like to see you in his office after breakfast"

The announcement came from Professor McGonagall, just after Dumbledore had left the Great Hall. She had come over to their table, but announced it so the whole table could hear.

Harry glanced up the table, and saw the trace of a smirk on Ron's face, though it vanished when he realised Harry was staring at him. He turned back to the Professor.

"We will be there, Professor" He said, and Sally and Harry nodded in agreement. Then the three of them stood up, and walked out of the hall, heading towards the Headmaster's office.

"So - do you think he knows?" Sally asked as they reached the second floor corridor

"I can't believe the Weasleys lasted this long without telling him" Harry snorted "So - do we tell him why Fudge is coming, or just make it a surprise?"

"What do you think Ron told him?" Hermione asked "Because if we tell him a different story then..." She trailed off as Harry stopped dead "Harry?"

"You know that Vanessa wanted to put me in Slytherin?" The two girls nodded "Would either of you mind if I let the silver and green side of me out to play?"

"Not if you tell us first" Sally said with a smile, then added "And how do I know the Sorting Hat's name?"

"I don't know" Hermione shook her head "But Harry? Slytherin?"

"What if we can get Minister Fudge to give credit for rescuing the dragon to our good and dear friend Mr Weasley?" He started to pace back and forth in the corridor "We were going to tell Minister Fudge that Hagrid took the egg from a guy in the pub, so he could watch it was it was born, then turn it over to the Ministry"

"Yes"

"What if we tell the Minister that he - Ron - had the idea of contacting the Minister, and sending the dragon to Romania. That Hagrid did take the egg to keep it safe, but that we had no idea what to do with it, and Ron came up with the idea"

"Why?"

"If the Minister is praising him, then Weasley can't turn on us and get us expelled" Harry smiled "And you get to stay here" Sally opened her mouth, then closed it again "What?"

"I was going to ask if you thought he would take the credit for something he didn't do. But then I remembered this is Ron we are talking about" The three of them laughed, then turned as the door to the Head's office opened.

"I guess that means we go in"

"Would you know why The Minister For Magic is visiting Hogwarts this afternoon?" Dumbledore asked.

"How would we know that, sir?" Hermione asked in reply.

"I don't know Miss Granger, but I thought that since Michael Whiteheart was coming with him, you might be aware of some information that hasn't reached me yet"

"I know Uncle Mike is coming, but he wants it to be a surprise" Harry said "So, why do you think they are coming, sir?" The three of them watched him, but he gave no sign of understanding what they were talking about.

"The Minister did not see fit to let me into the surprise either, Mr Potter" He looked at each of them "Are you sure there is nothing you wish to tell me?"

"No sir" Sally replied.

"Then you may go" He stood up, and gestured for them to leave, then stood in silence as they walked out. He closed the door behind them, then walked back to his desk and sat down.

They were lying. He knew that much, even if he hadn't used legilimency. For the first time since he had become Headmaster, he had been tempted, but he had resisted the urge. His last experience at reading the mind of a student - fifty years earlier, hadn't ended well, and it had left him a little wary of doing it again. But he knew they were lying. He just didn't know why.

"Minister Fudge, welcome to Hogwarts" Professor McGonagall greeted the Minister For Magic at the main doors to the school "How may I help you?"

"I am here to see your groundskeeper, and a number of your students, if that is all right?"

"Of course" McGonagall said "If you let me summon the Headmaster, we can go down to Hagrid's hut"

"No need to summon me, Minerva, for I am here" Dumbledore walked up behind them "Cornelius - it is a pleasure to see you. Shall I send for Miss Granger, Miss Perks and Mr Potter?"

"If you wouldn't mind" Fudge said, then added "And if you could ask Ronald Weasley to join us as well, I would be very grateful" He caught the look of surprise on Dumbledore's face, but refrained from commenting on it.

"Of course" Dumbledore turned to McGonagall "Minerva - if you could ask the four students to join us at Hagrid's hut?"

"Yes Headmaster" She turned, and walked towards her office. When she arrived, she stepped in to the fireplace, and a moment later emerged in to the Gryffindor common room. Spotting Fred and George Weasley, she strode over to them.

"Mr Weasley - do you know where I might find Potter, Granger, Perks and your younger brother?"

"We are here, Professor" Harry said, as he, Sally and Hermione came down the stairs from the boys dormitory "How can we help you?"

"The Minister For Magic would like to see you three and Mr Weasley at Hagrid's hut"

"Me?" A voice came from the portrait as Ron entered the room "Why does he want to see me?"

"If you will all come with me, you will find out" She gestured to the fireplace, and one by one the four students stepped through to her office. She followed them a moment later, then lead them down towards the groundskeeper's hut. As they walked, Sally caught sight of Ron's face, and nudged Harry, who nudged Hermione, and they all smiled at the look of growing confusion Ron was wearing. By the time they reached the hut, the three of them were having trouble keeping their faces straight.

"Charlie?" Ron stopped in surprise as he realised the identity of one of the people he was approaching. His older brother, along with five other men, Minister Fudge and Sirius, were all stood near the hut.

"Miss Granger, Miss Perks - hello" Minister Fudge smiled, then turned to Harry "And Harry - it is nice to see you again"

"Likewise Minister" Harry nodded "Thank you for coming all this way. May I present Mr Ronald Weasley"

"Mr Weasley!" Fudge actually reached out and shook his hand "I would like to thank you for your help in this. Your suggestion to send the dragon to your brother's colony was inspired"

Ron stared at the Minister for a few moments, then looked across at Harry, totally confused. For a moment, Harry had the urge to let him stay like that, but then remembered the plan.

"Remember when you were peering in through the window, the night the dragon was hatched, and coming in to the hut and suggesting that we could ask Minister Fudge to send it to your brother Charlie?" He held his breath, wondering if Ron would actually be Gryffindor enough to be honest, but a moment later he released it when Ron did exactly what the three of them had predicted.

"Yeah - it was my idea, wasn't it?" He turned to Dumbledore, and so missed three pairs of eyes rolling in perfect synchronization.

"And that is why I came here personally - to thank you for solving a difficult problem, and on behalf of the dragon sanctuary, to thank Hagrid for the gift of the dragon"

"You're welcome" Ron replied, looking more confident by the second.

"And thank you Harry, and your Uncle, for your assistance"

"It's not a problem, Minister" Sirius replied "We couldn't let Hagrid get in to trouble after he did such a good deed, and after Mr Weasley's quick thinking, the rest of the plan was a piece of cake" He turned to Harry "Shall we go, and let Ron catch up with his brother?" He, Harry and the two girls set off back to the castle, leaving the others to deal with the dragon. Once they were out of earshot, Sirius turned to Harry with a huge smile on his face.

"That was FUN!!"

Chapter 11

A month after their victory over Ron and the other Weasley brothers, the three Gryffindors came up against a much harder challenge - exams.

"I thought there were laws against torturing children" Harry moaned. They had just spent the afternoon transfiguring mice in to snuff-boxes "And isn't it a bit cruel to the mice?"

"Professor McGonagall will transform them all back" Sally said "And they don't feel it anyway"

"So - Charms and Transfiguration are done" Hermione smiled "Potions and Astronomy tomorrow, then History Of Magic on Thursday. Have I left anything out?"

"Do you ever?" Sally replied with a smile, then stood up "I'm going for a walk down by the lake. Anyone want to join me?"

"I'm going to stay here - revise potions and so on" Hermione said "But I'm sure Harry would go with you" She looked at him and he smiled.

"Okay then" Sally and Harry walked out of the common room together, leaving Hermione to stare at them for a moment with a soft smile, before turning back to her potions notes.

"So - tell me a story" Sally said, as they walked around the lake.

"A story?" Harry looked at her "About what?"

"You and Hermione" She replied "Before you came here"

"Why?"

"Take out minds off exams" Sally smiled "Pass the time" 'Stop me talking about how cute I think you are' She added mentally.

"Well - in our second year at St Juliet's, there was a disco..."

"Disco?"

"Kind of like a ball, but less formal"

"Oh"

"Well... there was a disco, and..."

(flashback)

"He is going with Susan"

"Then why did he ask me?"

"Because he says you are a know-it-all who needs taking down a peg or two" He saw the look on her face, and felt like kicking himself "His words, Minnie"

"You're wrong" She replied, then stormed off.

(end of flashback)

"Minnie?"

"Don't tell her I told you"

"Why?"

"She'll HURT me!"

(flashback)

"You want to dance?"

"No"

"Want to go home?"

"No"

"Want to make him look stupid and see if you can make him cry?"

There was a pause.

"Okay"

(end of flashback)

"He stood her up?" Sally asked in surprise.

"He turned up to the dance with Susan" Harry replied.

"Just like you said" Sally continued, and Harry nodded.

"I wasn't going to go, but when she said she was, I asked my Uncle to take me"

"And what did you do to him?" Sally asked, then stopped as Harry blushed and stared at the ground "Harry?"

"Before you judge me, we were both young and childish, and we were both a little sorry after we did it" She nodded "We raided the caretaker's supplies, then waited until he came back from the loo, and soaked his pants so it looked like he had wet himself" Sally burst out laughing "He didn't notice until Susan pointed it out. In the middle of the hall. In front of all her friends. He ran away and hid until his mother came to pick him up" He looked at Sally, who was still laughing.

"So you two were even displaying a Slytherin side back then?" She continued, trying to stop laughing.

"He hurt my Minnie - no one gets to do that"

"Your Minnie?"

"She's my friend" Harry said with conviction "So are you, and no one messes with you either" He put his hands on his hips in a "Peter Pan" pose, causing Sally to start laughing again. Then she leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"And we both thank you for it" She said softly.

They stood looking at each other for a moment, then they both blushed and turned away. Sally looked over the shore of the lake, then her eyes drifted to Hagrid's hut, and something popped in to her brain.

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"The dog is guarding something, right?"

"Probably"

"And it's a monster?"

"Yes"

"Who in this school has a fondness for monsters?" Harry turned, then followed her gaze across to Hagrid's hut.

"You think the Cerberus belongs to Hagrid?"

"Don't you?"

"It makes sense I guess" He continued to stare "Why did you bring this up?"

"Well..." She looked back at the castle "Never mind"

"You sure?"

"Yeah" She smiled "We should get back"

"I can't believe we forgot Defence Against The Dark Arts" Hermione said as they walked to the exam.

"To be fair, it's not like Quirrell has been a big influence on us this year" Harry replied "Can you actually remember any of his classes?" He saw Hermione open her mouth "Never mind"

"The only time I really remember him was Halloween" Sally frowned
"When he was..." She trailed off, lost in a memory.

"When he was what?" Hermione prompted.

"You said the troll was a diversion for Snape" Hermione nodded "How did it get in?" She looked at them both "Dumbledore never explained how it got in to the dungeons"

"And you said something about Quirrell..." Harry added "He wasn't fleeing from the troll?"

"So you think he and Snape are working together?" Hermione asked.

"Why not?" Sally asked "Quirrell lets the troll in, then distracts the staff so Snape can get passed the dog"

"Except the hell-puppy bit him" Harry smiled "So he couldn't"

"THAT'S IT!!" Sally yelled suddenly, causing everyone in the corridor to turn and stare at her "Sorry"

"What is 'it'?" Hermione whispered.

"The thing I was trying to remember by the lake" Sally started, but then the door opened, and Quirrell told them to go inside for the exam.

"Here's what I think" Sally said "And, you know, feel free to tell me I'm mental" She paused for breath, then continued "The dog is guarding something, but probably not the portal to Snape's house. We know Snape tried to get through the trapdoor the night of Halloween, and that the Cerberus stopped him" She took another breath "We are also fairly sure the dog belongs to Hagrid"

"We are?" Hermione asked.

"Didn't we mention this?" Harry looked at Sally "I thought you told her?"

"I thought you did" Sally smiled, then looked across at Hermione "When we were talking by the lake, it kind of occurred to us" She turned to Harry.

"Who else would look after a dog that size?" He asked, and Hermione gave a small laugh.

"So - if the dog belongs to Hagrid, he might know how to control it" Sally said "How to get passed it. And all of a sudden a strange guy at a pub gives him something he has ALWAYS wanted" She looked at the others, but they were both staring at her blankly "What if he said something about the dog?"

"And what if the person he got it from was one of our teachers?" Hermione nodded, understanding Sally's point. She looked out of the window "We should go and talk to him"

"And say what?" Harry asked "Did you tell Snape how to sneak passed a giant dog with three heads?"

"Well - I thought we might be more subtle than that" Hermione replied "But what if we are right? Snape and Quirrell could be going down there already" She looked at both of them "Look - I don't know what is beneath the trap door, but if Dumbledore arranged for a massive dog to guard it, then it is probably something dangerous, or important, or both. And either the Headmaster doesn't know that any of this is going on, or he trusts Snape and Quirrell. Either way - we are the only ones who can stop him. Or them" She stood up and walked to the portrait hole "You coming?"

"Hagrid - what do you remember about the guy you won Norbert off?" Hermione asked, as they sat in his hut.

"'e said 'e was just a guy on vacation. We had a few drinks, played a few 'ands and talked" Hagrid replied "'e said 'e was on 'oliday from bein' a dragon keeper from the east"

"So you talked about your job?"

"Course - s'not often I get to talk to someone in the business" He smiled "'e asked if I could look after the dragon, an' I told 'im that after some of the animals I have cared for, a baby dragon'd be easy"

"Like what?" Harry asked "Because we ran across a giant three-headed dog in the school, and it seemed to be the type of creature you would look after"

"'ow do you know about Fluffy?" Hagrid turned in surprise.

"Fluffy?" Three voices replied in equal surprise, then Hermione continued "So how do you take care of... Fluffy?"

"S'like I told the guy - Fluffy can be a real difficult case, but if ya play 'im a little music 'e will fall fast asleep" The three kids looked at him in shock, and then he continued "Maybe I shouldn't 'ave said that"

"So - do you know who the man in the pub was?" Sally asked quietly.

"Not as such... 'e was wearin' a cloak with a hood" Hagrid said, sounding uncertain.

"Hagrid!"

"I know. I shouldn't 'ave said that" The groundskeeper sounded so regretful that Hermione tried to comfort him.

"Don't worry Hagrid, it's probably nothing" She smiled re-assuringly, then added "Guys - it's getting dark. We should go"

The three students spent the next day on the edge - they could barely concentrate on the History Of Magic exam, as they thought about what Snape and Quirrell might be doing, and what Fluffy was doing.

As soon as the exam finished, they raced out of the room and down to Hagrid's hut, but he wasn't there.

"So - do you think he knows what is beneath the trap door?" Harry asked "And where is her?"

"Hold on" Sally said, reaching up "This note says he has gone in to the forest - something about a unicorn"

"Damn" Hermione swore, causing Harry and Sally to stare at her in surprise "I hate to say this, but I think we have to go and see the Headmaster - he must know what's going on, and he can stop them" Sally looked across at Harry, who nodded in resignation.

"I know you don't trust him Harry, but..."

"I know" He sighed "Lets go"

Five minutes later they ran up to the castle and along the corridor.

"We can't just enter the Head's office - it has a password"

"Professor McGonagall"

"Okay" They ran up the stairs, and to the Transfiguration classroom. They burst in and ran up to the front.

"Heavens! What are you three doing running around like that?" McGonagall asked.

"We need to see the Headmaster" Sally said.

"It's important!" Harry added.

"Headmaster Dumbledore has been summoned to The Ministry. Perhaps I can help?" The three of them looked at each other, then Hermione nodded.

"We know that there is a Cerberus in the school" Harry said "And we know that it is guarding something very important"

"How..." McGonagall started, but Harry cut her off.

"We think Snape and Quirrell are going to try and steal it - whatever it is - and we have to stop them"

"Hold on!" McGonagall raised her hand, and Harry stopped talking "Professors Snape and Quirrell helped with the protecting the... thing, so why would they want to steal it? Besides - Professor Dumbledore trusts them"

"But..."

"ENOUGH!" She slammed her hand down on the desk, silencing the kids. She walked round to the front of her desk, causing Harry and the others to take a step back "They are both trusted members of staff, and the Philosopher's Stone is perfectly safe" She stared at them "IS. THAT. CLEAR?"

"Yes Professor" Hermione said, pulling on the arms of the other two "We're sorry to bother you" She yanked the others out of the room, then round the nearest corner.

"Ow!" Harry said, pulling his arm away from Hermione "What was that?"

"Didn't you hear what she said?" Hermione asked.

"That despite all the evidence, and - you know - common sense - Dumbledore and McGonagall still trust Snape and Quirrell?" Sally said with a snort.

"Well - yes" Hermione said "But she also told us what Fluffy is guarding - the Philosopher's Stone" There was a pause as Harry and Sally stared at her "So you don't know what it is either?"

"No" Harry sighed, but then his head shot up "But doesn't this school have a huge library?"

"The Philosopher's Stone is an ancient, alchemical substance, used to turn lead into gold, and can also grant eternal life to the person who possesses it" Sally put down the book "Why would Snape need eternal life?"

"He could finally get his hair clean?" Harry replied with a laugh.

"And Quirrell?"

"Might become a good teacher?" Harry laughed, then sighed "I have no idea why either of them would want it. But they let a troll in to the school, so I think we can safely say they are not good guys" He stood up and looked at them "So - do we go back to the common room like the good little children we aren't, and let Snape and Quirrell steal the Stone? Or do we do what we know is right and go and stop them?" Before they could answer, he held up his hand "They are grown wizards, and we are barely done with our first year. There's a good chance they will kill us, and laugh while they do it"

"On the other hand, they might not" Sally said with an optimistic smirk "And Vanessa made us three Lions for a reason" Hermione stared at her for a moment "What?"

"Nothing" She shrugged "And honestly - if we go back to the common room, then we will have to deal with Ron and his brothers talking about the match and trying to get you to visit over the summer and trying to get Sally expelled" She smiled "Can Quirrell and Snape really be any worse than that?" Harry stared at both of them, then laughed.

"You two are crazy. You do know that"

"We know" They replied together.

"So - we go?"

"Yes. We go"

Ten minutes later they arrived at the door to Fluffy's room.

"Ready?"

"No"

"You?"

"Not really"

"That's the spirit!"

"Let's go"

Chapter 12

Harry pushed the door open slowly, and the three of them peered inside. Fluffy was sleeping - loud snores echoed through the room, nearly drowning out the sound of the enchanted harp in the corner.

"Looks like they have been here already" Sally said quietly "Which is lucky for us I guess"

"Lets go" Hermione said, and the three of them crept forward to the trap door. Harry kept an eye on the sleeping dog, while the girls lowered themselves through, then he sat on the edge and dropped.

THWUMP!

"What's going on?" He asked, feeling what seemed to be a plant.

"Devil's Snare" Sally replied.

"How do you know?"

"First points for Gryffindor, and it's trying to kill us"

"Ah. Can you remember how to escape?"

"No" Sally replied "You?"

"The plant nearly ripped by leg off" Harry said "What do you think?"

"It's a good thing someone was paying attention" Hermione said. Then she pulled out her wand and yelled "LUMOS SOLARIS". The three of them watched as the plant shrivelled in the bright light. Moments later the three of them fell through onto the floor below.

"Thank you" Sally hugged her "And sorry"

"Me too" Harry added.

"Not a problem" Hermione smirked "Shall we continue?" They walked down the passage until they reached a door. Sally pressed her ear against it.

"There's a kind of a rustling sound" She said "But it's very quiet" She pushed the door open, and the three of them walked in and looked around. There was a door on the other side, and there appeared to be a lot of shiny balls flying around near the top of the room.

"So - what do you think?" Hermione looked around "Do you think we can just go through the door?"

"Lets see" Harry walked across the room, and tried to pull the door open "It's locked"

"Are you a wizard or not?" Sally asked with a smirk.

"Ooops" He blushed, then turned back and pulled out his wand "Alohamora!" Then he turned back "It's still locked"

"Darn" Hermione looked up towards the roof "Oh my" She pulled on Sally's arm "Do they look like keys?"

"Now you come to mention it..." She looked around, and saw something in the corner "Is that a broomstick?" She summoned it, and it flew over to her "Are you thinking what I am thinking?"

"Do you want to do it?" Hermione asked.

"I think I should" Sally sighed "Unless you want to?" Hermione shook her head, and added "Not Harry either" Sally shrugged, then flung one leg over the broomstick and shot into the air. Harry looked up, then walked over to Hermione.

"Where is she going?"

"We think the key is flying around up there" Hermione said "Any idea what it looks like?" Harry glanced back at the door, then turned back to Hermione.

"Old. Brass probably" He yelled up to Sally, then watched as she flew around at high speeds. His eyes widened in surprise as she rolled over, whipped out her hand and pulled back the key they were looking for "Is she really that good?"

"Her father played for his house and was, apparently, one of the best in his generation"

"And the reason she hasn't mentioned this to Wood is..."

"Because no one likes me" Sally said, coming in to land beside them
"So why should I put myself out for them?" She held up the key
"Want to see if this works?"

"Wow" Harry said, staring at the unconscious form of a troll "That is a big troll"

"Do you think it is the same one?" Sally asked.

"It would make sense - after we beat it the first time they could have moved it up here" Hermione said "But it does make me wonder..."

"What?" Harry and Sally asked together.

"Dumbledore seemed surprised by the troll at Halloween" She replied
"But what if he knew the troll was coming into the school?" She saw Harry frown "Disturbing thought, isn't it?"

"How does he think I am ever going to trust him again?" Harry asked, then looked over at the door "We should go on" He said, then added "But be careful"

They walked over to the door, all three of them holding their wands out in front of them, and pushed it open. When they were sure nothing was going to leap out at them, they walked inside.

"You know who we really need, don't you?" Sally said as they stared at the giant chess set arrayed in front of them.

"I know" Hermione sighed "But we can't go back and get him, and be honest - would you really want to put up with his bragging?"

"I guess not" Harry looked over at Sally, who was staring at the door they had just come through "Sal?" She turned and looked at him, eyebrows raised questioningly "What are you thinking?"

"I was just wondering if we could levitate the troll in here, wake it up and let it take care of the pieces for us?" The other two stared at her for a moment, then suddenly Hermione threw her arms up in triumph.

"THAT'S IT!!" She yelled.

"Okay" Sally said "I will go get the troll"

"What?" Hermione replied "Oh - no. Not that. But what if we could levitate each other over the chess pieces?" She looked at the four ranks of pieces between them and the next door.

"I guess we could try" Harry said "Do you want to go first?"

"Okay" She pointed her wand at him "Wingardium Leviosa"

The two girls watched as he floated up in to the air. For a moment he looked around, then he closed his eyes.

"Harry? You okay?" Sally asked.

"Kind of makes me feel a little sick" He said, still keeping his eyes closed.

"Oh - sorry. I will try to make it quick" He felt himself moving, then a swish of metal, a gasp of surprise from Sally, then he felt himself being lowered to the ground. A moment later he opened his eyes and found himself on the far side of the chess set from the girls.

"It worked!" He yelled, then he saw the look of fright on his friends' faces "What did I miss?"

"The king's sword was a touch longer than I thought it would be" Hermione said in a shaky voice "It came a little closer to you than it should"

"Well - I'm fine" He smiled "So - who's next?"

"That was fun!" Sally said as Hermione lowered her to the ground
"Remind me to do it again after we get out"

"You are a very weird girl" Harry said with a smile.

"And I love you too" She replied, kissing him on the cheek, then laughed as he blushed. She turned and smiled at Hermione "Come on - let's see what's next in this magical mystery tour"

"Huh" Harry said.

"Huh" Sally said.

"Is that all you have to say?" Hermione stared at both of them. Sally looked across at Harry, who shrugged.

"Pretty much, yeah" Sally smirked.

"Oh - you two" Hermione threw up her hands in frustration, then picked up the paper on the table "We just have to work out which bottle we need, and it should be fairly easy once we apply some logic" She fell silent for a few moments, then pointed to one of the bottles "That one"

"Are you sure?" Harry asked, then fell silent at the look Hermione gave him "Sorry"

"There's only enough for one of us" Sally said, then turned and looked at Harry "It's you, isn't it?"

"Not if I can help it" He looked at the flames blocking the door "Minnie - I need to ask you a favour"

"You want me to go back?"

"Do you know which potion?" She pointed at another phial "Can you go back and find a teacher?"

"Okay" She looked across at Sally, then back at Harry "Why me?" He looked across at Sally, then back to his first true friend "Two reasons. First - the teachers are more likely to believe you. Sally and I are not exactly teacher's pets"

"And the second?"

"Your defensive magic. You are..." He tried to find the best way to phrase it, but Hermione beat him to it.

"Not as good as you and Sally?" She said with a smile "I know" She took hold of the potion she had pointed to earlier, and drank it. The flames that had been blocking the door behind them died down, and then vanished completely. She looked back at them "Don't die, okay?"

"We'll try" Sally said, then hugged her. Harry leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

"We'll be careful" He whispered. Then he and Sally watched her go. When she had left, they both turned and faced the flames blocking their path.

"Ready?"

"No. You?"

"No. But lets go" Harry picked up the phial Hermione had said was the one they needed, and was about to drink it when Sally held up her hand "What?"

"I just wanted to say thank you"

"For what?"

"For this year" She smiled at him "You and Hermione"

"You're welcome" Harry said. He thought there was something he was missing, but for the life of him he could not work out what it was. She kissed his cheek, then handed him the potion.

"Drink up!" They watched the fire go out, then walked up to the door. They both pulled their wands out again, then pushed the door open slowly.

A few moments later, they walked down the last of the steps and in to a massive chamber. Looking around, they caught sight of someone at the other end. With a quick look at each other, they started to move towards the figure.

"That's far enough" The figure turned "And you can put your wands down children, you won't be needing them any more"

"Professor Quirrell" Harry said, not lowering his wand "No Snape?"

"Severus? I suppose he looked more guilty. And who would suspect little old me?"

"We did" Sally said "We knew you let the troll in to the school" She saw the look of disbelief on his face "I was in the corridor outside the great hall when you came down it"

"Oh well" He said with a smile "I will learn for next time" He turned away from them "Do either of you recognise this?" He gestured to the end of the hall, and they saw a mirror. Sally glanced at Harry, but he stayed staring ahead "So - Miss Perks. You recognise it"

"Maybe. If I could come closer, then I can see it better"

"Very well, but please - put your wand away" Quirrell said with a smile "We wouldn't want any... accidents, would we?" Sally put her wand in to her pocket, and walked up to the mirror.

"Oh - it's the mirror of destiny" Sally said with a smile "I read about it in one of Hermione's books" She looked up at him, still smiling "You know how she likes to read Professor"

"I know the Stone is in there" Quirrell said "But how do I get it out?" He turned and stared at her "Tell me"

"I don't know sir" Sally replied "I think you can only get the Stone if it is your destiny"

"She lies" The voice seemed to come from nowhere. Sally looked around, then she saw Harry's face. When they had been fighting the troll on Halloween, he had looked scared, but that was nothing compared to the look on his face at that moment. His eyes were wide with terror, and he was backing away.

"Why are you lying to me girl?" Quirrell asked.

"I'm not" She was still staring at Harry, who looked on the verge of catatonia.

"Let me speak to her" The voice said again.

"Are you sure, my Lord?"

"Yes" The voice replied. Sally watched with mounting horror as Quirrell unwrapped the turban he wore. She had never been particularly perceptive - both her parents had been able to sense magic naturally (not to mention her mother ALWAYS knew when she was lying), but she knew she hadn't inherited their talent. But even she couldn't fail to notice the dark magic now pervading the chamber.

When the turban was finally removed, Quirrell turned his back on Sally, and she stared up at the face that had appeared in the back of the defence teacher's head.

"Do you recognise me now, girl?" The face said in a rasping voice. Sally looked over at Harry, who was now backed up against the far wall of the chamber, still staring at Quirrell in terror. She looked back at the face, and suddenly she knew. She tried to keep the fear out of her voice, but she knew she wasn't entirely successful.

"Lord Voldemort" She said "We kind of hoped you were dead"

"Ten years ago I thought I was. The night I went to that house was supposed to be the night of my greatest triumph" He turned and stared at Harry "And yet the night that should have been the start of my domination of the world instead became the night that lead to the

start of my banishment. A boy, barely a year old, ripped my soul from my body and left me a shadow of my former self"

"And yet you are here" She saw Harry looking up, paying more attention than he had been "Why him?"

"It was prophesied that he had the power to kill me" Voldemort said "When I learned of the prophecy, I knew I could solidify my rule by destroying the only threat to my future when he was but a baby" He turned to face Harry "Clearly there were problems"

"What did the prophecy say?" Sally asked, dragging the Dark Lord's attention back to her.

"Enough!" Voldemort snarled "Tell me what I want to know" He smiled, and Sally took a step back in terror.

"I do not know" She replied "If this is the Mirror of Destiny..."

"You think you can lie to my Lord?" Quirrell span round and raised his wand "Tell me, or suffer unimaginable pain"

"She doesn't know" Harry yelled, running towards them "It is The Mirror Of Erised" Sally gaped at him, but he held up his hand to keep her quiet.

"That tells me nothing, boy" Voldemort turned and faced him "Come forward, young Potter" Harry looked at Sally, smiled, then he walked towards Voldemort and the mirror.

"Harry - you can't..." Sally started, then stopped when Harry looked at her.

"Sally - Sal. We can't fight him" He said quietly "This is for the best" He held out his hand, and when she took it, he passed her the empty phial he had carried from the previous room "When the time is right, we can help him"

"Okay" She replied, slipping the bottle up her sleeve. He smiled at her again, then turned to Voldemort.

"How may I serve you, my Lord?"

"Tell me how to get the Stone, young Potter, or I will punish the girl"

"I am not sure, my Lord. May I examine the mirror closely?" He watched as Voldemort/Quirrell stepped to the side, then he walked forward. He made a show of examining the mirror, then moved to the side away from Quirrell. He turned and glanced at Sally. She nodded, and a moment later she yelled "ENVARA!" The empty bottle flew out of her hand, and shot towards the mirror. He dived out of the way, and watched as the phial crashed in to the surface of the mirror. A moment later, The Mirror Of Erised shattered, covering Harry in glass.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING!!" Voldemort screamed, and suddenly Sally flew across the hall and slammed in to a pillar. Harry watched her slump to the ground, but a moment later Quirrell's wand was trained on him "I will make you suffer beyond your worst nightmares, foolish boy!" Voldemort hissed. Harry looked around, trying to find a way out. If Sally hadn't just blown up the mirror, he could have hidden behind it, but since it was kind of his fault, he did the only other thing he could think of.

"EXPELLIARMUS!!"

The wand flew out of Quirrell's hands and shot across the chamber. Voldemort let out a scream of rage, and leaped at him. Seconds later, Harry felt hands closed around his neck as they both tumbled to the ground.

"What... what magic is this?" Quirrell screamed as his hands burst in to flames. He pulled away, but the flames spread to his arms. Harry watched as Quirrell flailed around, then he saw a streak of red light shoot towards him, and everything went black.

Chapter 13

Hermione was sat in the hospital wing, staring at her friends. Harry and Sally were still unconscious from their fight in the chamber, and Madam Pomfrey looked worried every time she had checked on them.

After she had left them in the potions room, she had made it back to the room with the flying keys when she had met Dumbledore coming the other way. She had explained what was going on, then dragged him through the rooms, watching as he cast a number of spells to bypass the protections.

When they got into the mirror chamber, Hermione cried out in shock. Harry was lying on the floor at the far end of the hall, and Sally was slumped against a column, in an expanding pool of blood. There was also a pile of ashes, and what appeared to be a smashed mirror. She was about to run over to her friends when the Headmaster put up a restraining hand on her shoulder. She looked up at him.

"There might be traps, Miss Granger. Permit me" He waved his wand over the room for a few minutes, then he nodded "We must work quickly"

Ten minutes, and some extra-ordinary magic, later, Harry and Sally were resting in the hospital wing, and Dumbledore had gone back to the mirror chamber to see what else he could discover. She had sat and watched them for a few minutes, then realised what she had to do.

She ran up to the owlery, and sent off two quick letters, then turned to Harry's owl.

"Elana - I need to send a letter to Harry's guardian, but I don't know how to find him. Will you deliver it for me?" The owl stared at her for a moment, then it held out its leg. Hermione smiled, attached the third letter and then thanked the owl. As the bird flew away, she set off back to the hospital wing.

"Arnold - there's a letter from Hermione"

"Elana?"

"Aren't you a sweetie! What do you have for me?"

"Where... where's Harry?" Sally sat up, then winced and fell back against her pillow.

"He's right here" Hermione said, sitting down next to her "You cut your head, broke your arm and got a little bit of a concussion, so don't move, and I will get Madam Pomfrey"

"Okay" Sally closed her eyes, then asked "How's Harry?"

"He hasn't woken up yet" Hermione said quietly "But Madam Pomfrey has stabilised him"

"He saved my life" She said "And he was so brave - he stood up to Voldemort without a second thought" There was a long pause as Hermione stared at her.

"Voldemort?"

"We should wait until Harry wakes up" Sally replied.

"Okay" Hermione agreed "Oh - I owed our parents to let them know what happened. They should be here soon"

"Good" Sally turned on her side to watch Harry, while Hermione went to fetch the healer.

"Susan? What are you doing here?"

"I received an owl saying my daughter and her friends had been injured in a fight. Could you take me to them please?" Sally's mother had marched in to the entrance hall and run in to Professor McGonall almost at once.

"Of course" Together they headed towards the hospital wing. McGonagall knew what had happened earlier that evening, but had no idea how the story had leaked out so fast "May I ask who sent you the owl?"

"Not the Headmaster" Susan Perks replied, glaring at the teacher "Would you like to explain why that is?"

"We did not want to alarm you until we knew the whole story" McGonagall replied, silently cursing the Headmaster for putting her in such an awkward position.

"Professor McGonagall" A voice called out behind them, and the two women stopped and turned to see Professor Flitwick walking up the corridor with two other people "The Grangers are looking for their daughter. Do you know where she is?"

"She is in the hospital wing" McGonagall replied "I was just accompanying Mrs Perks there, if you would like to come with us?"

"Mum! Dad!" Hermione jumped up as her parents came in to the infirmary. She ran in to their arms "How did you get here so fast?"

"That would be my doing" Sirius came in to the room behind them "After Elana had dropped off your letter, I went over to see if they had received one, then brought them via Hogsmeade" He gave her a quick hug, then looked over at his godson "Harry?" He went over and sat next to the bed.

"What happened?" Claire asked her daughter.

"I'm not sure" Hermione replied "I can tell you some of it, but I think we'll be better waiting for Harry to wake up"

"Okay" Arnold hugged her again, then the three of them sat down on the bed opposite the two patients.

They all sat in silence for a few minutes, then they turned as Professor Dumbledore walked into the hospital wing. Hermione

smirked as he stopped short in surprise at the amount of people he was confronted by.

"Well - this is a pleasant surprise" He smiled, looking around "May I ask how you all arrived here?"

"May I ask why you didn't see fit to inform us that my nephew and Miss Perks were injured?" Sirius said, standing up and facing the Headmaster "And how they got injured in the first place?"

"Uncle - don't be too hard on him" Harry's voice came from his bed "He lost an ancient magical mirror, a priceless alchemical compound and found out that Lord Voldemort has been in his school for a whole year. He's not having a good day"

"HARRY!!" Sally and Hermione called out together, then Hermione rushed over to his bed, while Sally asked him "How are you feeling?"

"Like I got stunned by a Defence Teacher who was possessed by a Dark Lord who was supposed to be dead" Harry replied "I wasn't a dream, was it?"

"No" Sally sighed "It wasn't" She walked over to the office and returned with Madam Pomfrey.

"Mr Potter - it's good to see you awake"

"I think I liked it better when I wasn't" He said faintly.

"Is that your way of telling me you are in pain?"

"Yes" She handed him a potion.

"Take this - it will help" She watched as he drank it, then turned to the Headmaster "He needs rest, as does Miss Perks. I trust they won't be kept up too late?"

"I will make every effort to ensure that we are done as soon as we are able" Dumbledore replied with a smile, then watched as the healer retreated to her office. When she had closed the door, he turned to Harry "Perhaps we can talk in private?"

"We could Headmaster, but you can be certain that whatever we discuss, I will tell Sally and Hermione afterwards. And I am sure they will not keep secrets from their parents" The two girls nodded, and Sirius smiled at his nephew.

"Very well" Dumbledore said after a moment of silence "What happened?"

Between them, Harry, Sally and Hermione told the group what had happened through the school year, and the events that had transpired once they went through the trap door.

"I must commend you - all three of you - for what you did tonight" Dumbledore said when they had finished.

"What happened to the Stone?" Arnold Granger asked.

"Destroyed, most probably" The Head replied "It was encased within the mirror, and when Miss Perks shattered it, the magical backlash would have vaporised it" He glanced at Sally "And the mirror itself was one of a kind, and a powerful magical artefact"

"You would have preferred Voldemort to get the Stone?" Susan asked archly, causing the kids to smirk.

"I take your point" Dumbledore looked across at Harry "Something troubles you?"

"Why couldn't Quirrell touch me?" He looked at the others "I don't think I cast a spell"

"I believe it was your mother's sacrifice that protected you" Dumbledore replied "She gave her life to save you as a child, and her love - her sacrifice - still protects you from Voldemort's touch" He paused "It is that protection that would make your aunt's house the safest place for you to stay when you are away from the school. The protection from your mother's love would be re-enforced by your blood bond with Petunia" He realised that everyone in the room was staring at him with varying degrees of disbelief.

"Headmaster - the Stone was under your idea of protection when Voldemort got to it. And these children were under your idea of protection when Voldemort tried to kill them" Susan frowned "How can you think that any of us would trust you to protect them outside the school when you can't even do it within it?"

There was a long silence after she finished speaking, which was eventually broken by Harry.

"Headmaster - why did Voldemort try to kill me when I was a baby?" Dumbledore stared at him for a moment before replying.

"I do not know" He said softly "I have my suspicions, but nothing I would feel happy about sharing" He held his breath, waiting for the response. When Harry nodded, Dumbledore relaxed "Well - if that is all, then we should let them rest" He turned to the other adults "Perhaps you would like to join me for an early breakfast?"

The Great Hall was decorated for the end of year feast. Harry and Sally had been released from the hospital wing earlier that morning - four days after the fight with Voldemort. They were both glad they had missed the final weekend - on the Saturday, Gryffindor had lost to Ravenclaw, putting them in last place in the Quidditch Cup. Ron had stormed round the common room like a bull in a china shop, and spent most of the time blaming Harry, and especially Sally, for the appalling performance.

He had only got worse the day after, when Hufflepuff beat Slytherin by 40 points. Not only did it mean they won the Cup, but it also put them in the record books. They had the largest number of points in history, the largest winning margin in history, and - and this was the fact that made Ron truly furious - they had beaten Gryffindor by 1,100 points - another all time record.

Harry, Sally and Hermione walked in to the hall, and looked towards the staff table. The black and yellow banners of Hufflepuff were hung around the hall, proclaiming that the 'Puffers had won not only the Quidditch Cup, but The House Cup as well. It had been pretty close for most of the year, but the total domination on the Quidditch pitch

had given them the points to win. The three of them stared at the banners for a moment, then walked over to their table, and sat down.

"So - Hufflepuff won The House Cup then?" Sally asked.

"Seems so" Harry said "Does anyone else know what happened under the trap door?"

"Actually - no" Hermione looked around, then lowered her voice "I haven't mentioned it, and Professor Dumbledore has managed to keep it very quiet"

"Do you think he is still angry about the mirror?" Sally asked "And losing the Stone?" She glanced up to see Dumbledore coming into the hall "Do you think I should go and talk to him?"

"No!" Harry and Hermione said together, then Hermione continued "He might be annoyed, but letting Voldemort get the Stone would have been far more of a disaster. Dumbledore understands that, even if he is angry right now"

"I guess" The three of them looked up the table, and saw Ron glaring back at them. The three of them look at each other, then burst in to laughter. Ron frowned, and looked away.

"I guess facing down an evil Dark Lord has its upside" Sally said with a smile.

"Like you were scared of him before" Hermione replied, causing them to laugh again. Sally looked over at Hermione, then they both turned to Harry.

"Can we ask you something?"

"Yes" Harry replied.

"What are your plans for the summer?"

"Spend it at home with my Uncle, not my Aunt" He smiled "And I was going to do as little as possible, but after this last week, there might also be some training thrown in" He saw them look at him in surprise

"Voldemort is back, and whatever the reason he wants me dead is, I don't think what we did to him last week is going to make him like me any better" He saw them nodding "Why?"

"We know you live under a fidelius charm, but we were wondering if we could come and visit you?" Sally asked. When he didn't reply at once, she continued "We were talking last night, and well... we will miss you and..." She trailed off and looked at Hermione.

"We don't think you should spend the whole of the summer alone" Hermione said "If you do - if you don't go out, don't have a little fun - then you might become overly obsessed with Voldemort" They watched him think about it for a moment, then he smiled.

"I will have to talk about it with Uncle Mike - he might want to talk to you first" Harry looked up at the top table "And he might want to make sure that you are the only ones to visit" Before they could reply, Dumbledore stood up, and gestured for silence.

"The end of another school year is upon us" The Headmaster said "And it is time to present The House Cup" For a moment, he rested his hand on the silver trophy in front of him, then he continued "At the moment, the standings are as follows :- Gryffindor have 349 points, Slytherin have 381, Ravenclaw have 392 and Hufflepuff, after their record breaking Quidditch season - have 458" Cheers erupted from the Hufflepuff table, but Hermione was staring at the Headmaster with a suspicious look on her face. "However, there was an incident last week that I feel deserves to be explained, as it will have some bearing on the awarding of The House Cup" The hall fell silent, and Hermione put her head in her hands.

"What?" Harry whispered.

"You know how your former house doesn't like you?" She whispered back to Sally.

"Yeah?"

"I think it's about to get worse"

"As you may have noticed" Dumbledore said "Professor Quirrell is not with us today. It appears that, for most of the past year, Professor Quirrell was suffering from delusions" He saw three students sit bolt upright in their chairs, but continued to talk "These delusions led him to believe he was serving a Dark Lord. It was in this imaginary service that he let a troll in to the school on Halloween, and that led him in to a restricted area of the castle last week" He realised the three students were now staring at him in disbelief "Sadly, he took it upon himself to take three first year students with him, against their will. But they fought him off, and freed themselves from his control" There were a few cheers from around the hall, but most of the students remained silent "They managed to escape, but not before Quirrell triggered a major magical explosion. He, and two of the students, were caught in the backlash, and while they received only minor injuries, he was, alas, killed" There were a few gasps of surprise "So - can I ask you to stand for a few moments silence"

Harry, Sally and Hermione watched as the rest of the students rose to their feet, then the three of them followed suit, staring at each other in stunned disbelief.

"Thank you" Dumbledore said a minute later, then - as the students retook their seats - he continued "In light of these events, I would like to award the following points. To Miss Hermione Granger, for keeping her head in a time of crisis - fifty points" Most of the Gryffindors cheered, but the other houses remained silent "To Mr Harry Potter, for bravery very becoming of his house, fifty points" The cheering from Gryffindor house was even louder this time, but now there was some subdued muttering from the other tables "And finally, for loyalty and friendship of which Helga Hufflepuff herself would have been proud, I award ten points to Miss Sally-Ann Perks"

At this, the entire hall exploded in to noise. The entire Gryffindor table, excluding the three students who had just been given points, were on their feet, cheering and stamping in celebration. The Slytherins were on their feet, booing as loud as they could, while the Hufflepuffs were also on their feet, but half of them were yelling objections to Professor Sprout, while the other half appeared to want to lynch Sally.

"And so" Dumbledore shouted over the noise, causing most of the students to quieten down "I believe a change of decoration is in order" He flicked his wand, and the yellow and black banners behind him morphed in to red and gold "Professor McGonagall, if you would like to collect the..." The Headmaster trailed off as he saw three students - the very students he had just honoured - stand up and walk out of the hall. As they reached the doors, he called out "Mr Potter - is there something the matter?"

Harry turned, and was about to open his mouth when he felt a hand on his arm. He glanced to his left, and saw Sally shaking her head. He looked back up the hall to where Dumbledore was standing, then he shrugged, and he, flanked by Sally and Hermione, walked out of the hall in silence.

"All together?"

"Just you"

"Why?"

"Because he still want you to stop being friends with us, and for you to bow down to his will, and if he asks for all of us then we would be able to back you up"

"Makes sense" Harry stood up, and started pacing back and forth across the common room "Did you see the look on their faces?"

"Did you see the look on Ron's?" Sally replied "He actually smiled at me!"

"You won The House Cup for Gryffindor" Hermione smiled "You are going to be his hero" The portrait hole opened, and Professor McGonagall came in.

"Mr Potter - the Headmaster would like to see you"

"Just me?" He asked, turning to wink at Sally "Why not Hermione and Sally?"

"Professor Dumbledore does not have to explain his reasons. Now come along After they had left, Sally turned to Hermione.

"Do you think he will lose any points?"

"After Dumbledore went to so much trouble to make sure Gryffindor win by a point? Not likely"

"Perhaps, Harry, you are wondering about the version of the story I gave at the feast"

"Amongst other things, sir"

"Lord Voldemort's spirit has been banished - he is no longer a threat" Dumbledore took his glasses off and polished them, then looked at Harry "I saw no need to worry the population of the school over something that is not a problem"

"But..." Harry started, then trailed off.

"But what?"

"Nothing, sir" Of all the students in the school, Harry knew his own history better than anyone. Voldemort had been vanquished ten years before, and everyone had relaxed. And Harry couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't over, and he also couldn't shake the feeling that Dumbledore knew that too "About the points, sir?"

"Congratulations for winning The House Cup" The Headmaster said with a smile.

"Thank you, but I think this is going to make life a lot more difficult for Sally, sir"

"Nonsense my boy - her house mates will love her"

"That is as maybe, but I am not sure the Hufflepuffs will feel the same"

"She abandoned them, so why should she care what they think?"
Dumbledore stood up "If that is all?"

"Yes sir" Harry got up and walked towards the door.

"Harry?"

"Yes sir?" He turned to look at the Headmaster.

"Would you reconsider my offer to stay at your Aunts?" Harry paused before replying.

"If you truly believe Voldemort is gone, why would it be necessary to make that offer, sir?"

Next morning they packed up their stuff, and then met in the entrance hall to wait for the coaches that would take them to the station. When the carriages arrived, Harry and Hermione saw the black, skeletal horses again, while Sally looked on in disbelief.

"Sir?" Harry turned to Professor Flitwick, who was keeping an eye on the students as they waited to depart.

"Yes Mr Potter?"

"Why can't Sally see the horses? Are they real?"

"Yes, Mr Potter - they are called Thestrals"

"Then..."

"I am surprised that you can see them" Flitwick said "Usually, in order to see the thestrals, you have to have seen someone die"

"That explains it" Hermione said "Thank you sir" The three of them walked away from the Professor, then Sally turned to her two friends.

"So?"

"Our first year at St Juliet's, a kid in the year above got hit by a bus in front of the gates" Harry said softly "He died before the ambulance could arrive"

"Oh" Sally smiled sympathetically at him "But what about Quirrell?"

"You were unconscious, and I was stunned" Harry replied "Neither of us was awake to see him die" He looked back at the horses "They are kind of cute" He noticed Hermione looking at him as if he was mental "I am not saying I would take one home as a pet... Oh - never mind" He looked at Sally "Sal?"

"Just wondering if I will ever see them" She looked up "Oh - that sounds so bad, doesn't it?"

"Don't worry about it" Hermione smiled "And anyway - if next year is anything like this one..." They all chuckled, then looked up as an empty coach pulled up in front of them "Shall we go?"

The journey back to King's Cross proved to be very quiet. Ron poked his head in to thank Sally for winning The Cup for Gryffindor, but at the looks he received from the three of them, he went pale, then ducked out quickly and closed the door.

When they arrived at Platform 9 3/4, they collected their trunks, and went to find their parents.

"Harry! Hermione!" They heard yelling, and then ran to where Sirius, Claire and Arnold were stood waiting. After various hugs and handshakes were exchanged, they agreed Hermione could visit Harry over the summer, and they would sort out the details on the way back.

Five minutes later, Sally's mother arrived.

"Mrs Perks" Sirius said with a smile "It's nice to see you again"

"And you Mr Whiteheart" She replied while hugging her daughter "Come on Sally, we should be going"

"Mum - can I visit Harry over the summer?" Sally asked. Susan looked at her daughter, then at Harry. The smile they were sharing was unmistakable.

"We'll see" She replied, then they waved goodbye and walked down the platform, and out in to the muggle world. As they walked towards the local apparation point, Susan turned to her daughter "So - did you have a good first year at school?"

Sally thought about her mother's question. In the past year, she had been shunned by her house mates, nearly killed by a troll, resorted, shunned by her house mates again, come face to face with a giant, three-headed dog (twice), been attacked by a Dark Lord so feared that people still feared to speak his name ten years after he had died, and finally earned the wrath of an entire house due to the machinations of one of the most highly regarded light wizards in the history of the world.

Then she thought about Hermione and Harry.

"Yes mum, I have had a very good year"